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# Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

August 1968  
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AMONG THE BAD BABOONS

by  
Mack Reynolds

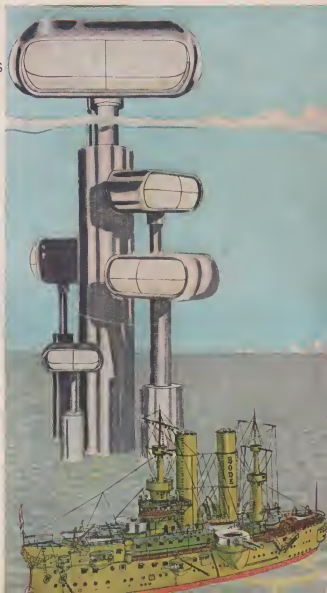
GOING DOWN SMOOTH

by  
Robert Silverberg

THE STAR BELOW

by  
Damon Knight

Fritz Leiber  
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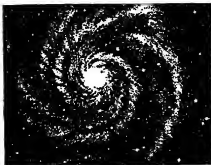
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# Galaxy

## MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES NEW

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# TONY BOUCHER

In the mid-thirties a young man named William Anthony Parker White resolved to begin a writing career. A canny friend advised him that "William" was not the most memorable of first names, nor "White" the most memorable of last — in fact, the Library of Congress listed no fewer than 75 writers named William White in some variation or another. So William A. P. White adopted a pen name. In fact, he adopted two. As H. H. Holmes he wrote mysteries — including that fascinating detective story in which the most enjoyable part of the detection is figuring out what real science-fiction writers and fans are hidden behind the made-up names, *Rocket to the Morgue* — and more recently brightened the pages of the *New York Times* book review on Sundays with his column of mystery criticism. As Anthony Boucher he ornamented our field since 1941, when *Snubbug* appeared in the old *Unknown*.

White, Holmes, Boucher — whatever you called him, Tony was a man of many talents. With

J. Francis McComas, he founded *The Magazine of Fantasy* in 1950 and piloted it to many honors. As a writer, he graced one of the first issues of this magazine with his *Transfer Point*. As an entertainer, he conducted a regular radio program on the Pacifica network and delighted many a science-fiction audience with his witty and informed talks as toastmaster and master of ceremonies, most recently at the Science Fiction Writers of America awards banquet in California, on March 16th of this year.

That was Tony's last public appearance. Six weeks later, on April 30th, he died, at the age of 56.

Tony Boucher graced our field. He had many friends, in all his areas of activity — perhaps he was the only man in the world who had to register at hotels under all three of his names, so all his friends could find him. None of them will miss him more than we do.

— FREDERIK POHL



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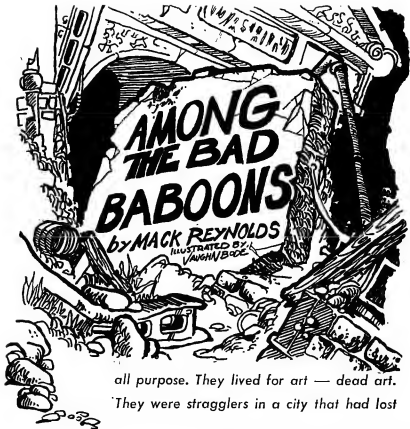
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all purpose. They lived for art — dead art.  
They were stragglers in a city that had lost

I

“One of these days you’re going to pierce your eardrum doing that,” Pamela Rozet said from the doorway.

“Uhhh?”

“That paint brush. If you don’t stop scratching the inside of your ear with it, you’re going to hurt yourself. Didn’t your

mother ever tell you not to stick anything smaller than your elbow in your ear?”

Arthur Halleck took the end of the paint brush in question out of his right ear and scowled dimly at it. He said, completely malapropos, “What in the name of the living Zoroaster ever happened to brushes? It was bad enough when they were making

them out of nylon. What's this stuff? Anything to cheapen the product. The old masters used to paint with bristle brushes, or red sable hair. Have you ever been in a museum and looked real closely at an original Rembrandt, or even a Leonardo?"

"Yes," Pam said.

"Did you ever see any hair from their paint brushes?"

"I didn't look *that* close," she said.

"Well, you didn't. But take a look at some of Picasso's stuff, not to speak of mine. Hair, or other brush fiber, all through the paint." He tossed the offending brush to a colorfully bespattered table. "I've been all over town. Into every art shop that survived in any shape at all. There's not a bristle brush to be found."

"Possibly you can get some on the mainland, when you take this painting over."

"No," he growled disgustedly. "They don't make them any more. You can't ultra-mate the manufacture of decent bristle brushes. And anything you can't ultra-mate in the Ultra-welfare State goes down the drain."

He stepped back and stared gloomily at the painting on the easel.

"Is it finished?" she asked.

"Doesn't it look finished?" he demanded in irritation.

Pam came closer and looked

and said patiently, "Long since I told you, Art, that I've never got beyond the Impressionalists."

"Well, damnit, the Representational-Abstract School is the nearest thing to the Impressionalists for decades. Can't you see, confound it?"

"No."

"Well, look. It gives the same effect as the quick impression Van Gogh, Renoir, Degas and the rest demanded. You get a quick flash, and your immediate impression is that it's completely abstract, but then you realize that it's the ruin of the entrance to a subway station."

"I guess you do, at that," she said doubtfully.

He stared at the four-foot-square painting. "No wonder it's no good," he said. "Working with this quick-drying metallic-acrylic paint on this ridiculous presdwood-duplicator board would have one of those Cro-Magnon cave painters climbing the wall."

"Aren't you going to have it duplicated and registered?"

"Of course. Sooner or later, I'm going to hit, Pam. Then it's you and me."

She looked at him, a shade of wistfulness in her overly tired face. She was a girl of averages, pleasantly so. Average height and weight and of an average pretti-



ness, given her approximately thirty-years of age. But there was a vulnerable something about her mouth that added. She was, and always had been, attractive to men who carried the dream, who were creative, ambitious.

"I thought it was already you and me, Art. That it had been for the past two years and more."

He said, a bit impatiently, "You know what I mean, Pam."

She went over to the window, avoiding the broken pane where it was patched with some old clothing, and rested her bottom on the ledge. She said, "Art, if we went back to the mainland and combined the income from our Inalienable Basic and added to that my royalties and your occasional sales, we'd be able to maintain a reasonably high standard of living. We'd also be in a position to make contacts, meet our own kind, associate with..."

"Associate with other charity cases," he broke in bitterly. "I've told you, Pam, I'll never become one more dependent on the Ultra-welfare State. I'll pay my own way in the world, or I'll go under. A man's got to be a man."

"You're not exactly paying your way right this minute, Arthur Halleck. We're scavengers, to use the politest term that comes to my tongue." Her tone was testy.

He shook his head. "Don't roach me, Pam. We don't take

anything that belongs to anybody. If we didn't find it and use it, it'd slowly rot or rust away."

She said, slightly irritated herself now, "Look here, darling, you're not taking anything that belongs to anyone else either when you accept the dividends that accrue to your ten shares of Inalienable Basic."

"Those dividends don't grow on trees. Somebody does the work that produces them," he said stubbornly.

She was really impatient now. "Look, Art, the super-abundance being produced under People's Capitalism now is not the product of the comparative handful of workers and technicians who are required in industry and agriculture today. It's the product of the accumulated work of all mankind down through the ages. A million years ago, some ancestor of yours and mine first used fire. The whole race has been doing it since. Five thousand years ago, some slick over in the Near East first dreamed up the wheel. We've been using it ever since. Every generation comes up with something brand new to add to the accumulated pile of knowledge, know-how, art, science. This accumulated human know-how doesn't belong to anybody or to any group, it belongs

to us all. At long last, as a result of it the human race has licked the problem of producing plenty for everyone. No one need go hungry any more, nor cold, nor unsheltered, nor uneducated, nor without proper medical care. This is the legacy our ancestors have left us. It belongs to all of us; as a matter of fact the ten shares of Inalienable Basic each citizen receives is a precious small slice of pie, if you ask me. Just enough to keep us lesser breeds from revolt."

"I still say it's charity," Art Halleck said stubbornly.

She brushed it off. "So what can you do about it? We didn't make this world and we're in no position to change its rules. Particularly over here. If we were on the mainland we might join the Futurists, or something."

He turned back to the painting on his easel and stared at it some more, saying over his shoulder, "I don't have to change the rules. Sooner or later, my work will hit, and I'll make my own way. You can still make your own way under People's Capitalism, if you've got it on the ball. Those at the very top don't depend on Ultra-welfare State-issued Inalienable Basic."

"They sure don't," she said sourly. "They usually have inherited enough Variable Basic or private stock to keep them

AMONG THE BAD BABOONS

like gods all their lives. And as far as hitting sooner or later, it's obviously not sooner. How many of the last paintings sold?"

He looked at her. "Seven."

"Seventy dollars worth, eh? Just barely enough to duplicate and register this one. By the time you've paid your transport back and forth to Greater Washington and possibly bought a couple of paint brushes or so, nothing left at all."

"One of these days I'll hit," he said stubbornly.

She gave up and turned and stared out the window in the direction of Washington Square.

## II

She said finally, "Art, was it beautiful?"

He was busy cleaning his brushes now, grumbling about the speed with which his metallic-acrylic medium dried.

"Was what beautiful?"

"Mahattan — before."

"Oh. Well, no."

"You were born here, weren't you?"

"Up in the Bronx."

"Before the riots?"

"Ummm. I was just a kid, but come to think of it, I was already sketching, drawing." He snorted deprecation. "How many artists bother to learn to draw any more? It's like a writer nev-

er bothering to learn the alphabet."

"Why wasn't it beautiful?"

He gave up his unhappy viewing of his work and his brushes and came to stand next to her, an arm going unconsciously around her waist. He followed her line of vision down along McDougal Street to the square where once scores of artist hopefuls had held their open-air shows.

He said thoughtfully, scowling, "It's an elastic word, beauty. Means different things to different people. You can find beauty in just about anything — garbage dumps, battlefields, desert, just about anything. But largely, big cities don't lend themselves to beauty. Manhattan was probably a lovely setting back when the Indians were here, or even when the first small Dutch settlement was huddled down at this end of the island. But the way it was by the middle of the 20th century? No. I've never been out of North America to supposedly beautiful cities like Paris, Rome or Rio, but I have seen San Francisco. It had a certain amount of beauty—before the riots, of course."

"I understand they weren't so bad there."

"Bad enough. However, they've cleaned out some of the ruins and resettled a pseudo-city there. It's hard to beat that Golden Gate setting."

They were silent for a moment, then she said, "How could it ever have happened, Art?"

He shrugged, and his words came slowly as he thought it out. "It could easily enough have been foreseen. A city like this had stopped making sense, Pam. The original reasons for cities — towns like Jericho began to be eight thousand years ago — had disappeared. Walled villages of farmers that could be defended against the nomads, trade centers built at crossroads, manufacturing centers, commercial centers. Putting walls around cities for defense stopped making sense. Modern transportation methods antiquated them as trade centers and manufacturing bases, as industry was able to decentralize. Today with communications what they are, even commercial centers are anachronisms. You can handle business from anywhere to anywhere."

"But what happened?"

"A lot of pressures. With the coming of automation and then ultra-mation, not only in manufacture but in agriculture, the under-educated farm laborers, the unemployables, the unplaceables flooded to the cities looking for jobs or, in their absence for relief, for free handouts. As their numbers grew, and with them ghettos and slums, the bet-

ter-to-do city dwellers streamed out to suburbs. That meant a drop in tax income, and the city was faced with inadequate funds for slum clearance, education, police and firemen. Even things like garbage collection were inadequately financed. Which meant that still more of the better paid citizens left. Industry began to leave too, to get closer to sources of raw materials, and to areas where labor was cheaper. So taxes took another nose dive.

"Television played a major part. These slum dwellers could watch the typical TV program which almost invariably portrayed the actors, and certainly the advertising actors, as living lives of plenty. Their apartments or homes were always beautiful and totally equipped, their clothes the latest of fashion, their food bountiful and of the best, their children healthy and handsome, the schools they attended ideal. Needless to say, the slum dwellers, wanted these things. So some of the more aggressive made a few demonstrations — and were landed upon, to their further embitterment. Alarmed, more of the better elements left town for the suburbs, for New England, up-State New York, Jersey, Pennsylvania. Some of the more prosperous actually commuted to Florida, flying back and forth. More industry left town then, because

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of higher taxes and the higher insurance rates caused by the riots. So the city fathers brought in less income than ever, and there was less to spend on slum clearance, education, relief. So the riots grew in magnitude."

Art Halleck shrugged in distaste at the memory. "So it went, and finally we had the big one. And never really recovered from that. Oh, things continued for a while. But by this time, nobody who could possibly afford it was left living in places like Manhattan, Detroit, Chicago and so on. Nor any business that could possibly get out. So came another riot, and another . . . and finally everybody left, including the police and firemen. That was the end."

"What happened to the slum element, the poverty stricken, the unadaptable?"

He looked down at her. "As a writer, I'd think you'd know at least as well as I."

"I wondered how you'd put it, in view of your feelings on the government issuing Inalienable Basic."

He said, slowly again, scowling and as if grudgingly, "I suppose it was in the cards. No alternative. At approximately the same time the cities were a confusion of riots and discontent, they issued Inalienable Basic to each citizen,

thus guaranteeing womb to tomb security. Overnight, not even the poverty stricken wanted to remain in the big cities. It was cheaper to live elsewhere, not to speak of being more comfortable. So they streamed out like lemmings — or maybe rats. All except the handful of baboons, of course."

Pam shook her head, and turned away from the view of the street. "I sometimes wonder why they never came back."

"Who?"

"The police and all. Why didn't they reconstruct?"

"Why? Like I said, the original reason for cities was gone and the cost to rebuild was prohibitive. It wouldn't even be worth while trying to clean it up for farmland, or pasture, or whatever. Too much debris, too much sheer wreckage. Oh, some of the other towns have been reconstituted, at least partially. Denver and San Francisco. But largely, they've been just left, continuing to deteriorate as the years go by."

She looked at him.

"And with only a few scavengers, such as ourselves, left in the ruins. No electricity, no water, no sewage. Nothing."

He snorted, tired of the subject. "I wouldn't say exactly nothing. We don't do so badly. By the way, I should have something to eat before going down to Greater Washington."

"Caviar, turtle soup, roast pheasant, imported British plum pudding in brandy sauce, with a good French claret to wash it down."

"I'm tired of that damn caviar."

### III

Mark Martino drifted in, as usual for lunch. He had four long-necked bottles in his arms. He also had an old-fashioned-looking six-shooter low on his right hip and an automatic pistol at belt level on his left. He looked surprisingly similar to that movie star of yesteryear, Robert Taylor, but he wouldn't have known that.

"Hey, chum-pals," he said. "Get a load of this."

"What is it?" Pam said, looking up from the camp stove which sat on the electric range in the kitchen.

"It's a real *Bernkasteler Doktor und Bratenhofchen Trocken-beerenauslese*."

"Oh great, now I know something I didn't know before."

"You, Pamela Rozet, are a peasant. This is the greatest of Riesling wines." He took one of the bottles and held it up and stared at the label and added, unhappily, "At least it once was; a Riesling shouldn't really age this long. Well, we'll see how it's held up."



"Where'd you find it?" Art said.

"You'd never think. In the cellar of that liquor store on the corner of West Third Street."

Art said, "I thought that joint had been looted bare years ago."

"Evidently, so did everybody else," Mark said. "But this was down in the cellar, under a lot of crud that had evidently caved in back during the raids and riots. There was a whole case of this Riesling and some odd and ends of cordials. I covered it back over, but it won't do any good."

"Why not?" Pam said. "You don't have any gasoline over in your apartment, do you?"

"A couple of baboons spotted me coming out of the place with these. They'll root around till they've found it. You want me to go over and bring you a jerry-can?"

Pam said, "Please do. I'm just about out and haven't been able to find any for a week."

Art said, "Is that why you're all rodded-up? The baboons?"

Mark, heading for the door, said, "Yeah. They were both strangers."

"Oh, hell," Art said. "We've been having it so easy here for months. You'd better tip off Julie and Tim."

"Already have," Mark said, leaving.

Art looked at Pam. "Maybe I'd

better put off taking this painting down to the museum."

"Why?" she said wearily. "Baboons and hunters we've had before. Undoubtedly, we'll have them again. Until . . ." she cut it off.

"Until what?"

"You know. Until one of these days, some baboon, or some hunter kills one or both of us."

He didn't say anything.

Suddenly it came out in a rush. "Arthur, we've got to get out of here. Arthur I'm afraid. I'm an awful coward."

He let the air out of his lungs and came erect from the kitchen chair upon which he had been sitting. He went over to the window and stared down.

Mark Martino came back with the can of gasoline.

"I don't know if this is white gas, or not," he said.

Pam said, "It doesn't make any difference with this stove."

Mark said, "I ran into some butane in a sports section of a department store yesterday. Want it?"

"No, I suppose not. I threw the butane stove away. I'm used to this gasoline thing now. Not as hot, really, but we should be able to get gas for some time yet."

Mark said, "Well, even it's getting scarce. I haven't found a

car with any in its tank for a coon's age." He looked from one of them to the other. "Did I interrupt a fight, or something?"

Pam said wearily, "No. No, not really."

Art said, "Pam wants to go back to the rat race."

She didn't say anything to that.

Mark said finally, "Well, why don't you? It doesn't make much sense, staying. We three and Julie and Tim, are the only ones left in this neighborhood."

"Why don't you?" Art said. He wasn't arguing, his voice meant that he was actually curious.

Mark held up one of the green bottles he'd brought as his contribution toward the lunch. "You know what one of these would cost, over on the mainland? That is, if you could find it at all."

"That couldn't be enough reason, even for a lush-head like you," Art said.

Mark thought about it. He said finally, ruefully, "I don't know. Wait a minute, I want to get something to read for you." He left again.

Pam said, "Why does anybody stay?"

Art knew he wasn't telling her anything she didn't know, but he said, "Some are criminals, fugitives from justice. Some are mental cases. Some, I suppose, are former immigrants, illegal entry

immigrants without papers and not eligible to apply for their ten shares of Inalienable ~~Basic~~, if they went over to the mainland. We lump them all up and call them baboons. But the rest of us? Well, I suppose we're non-conformists, rebels against the Ultra-welfare State."

"That takes care of everybody but me," Pam said, checking the canned pheasant she'd been warming up.

"And you, then?" Art said. "Why are you here?"

"Because you are."

There could be no answer.

Mark Martino came in again, an age-yellowed paperback book in his hand. He was looking for a place.

"Listen to this," he said. "It's from a guy named Arthur C. Clarke. *Profiles of the Future*, written back in the sixties." He began reading, "'Civilization cannot exist without new frontiers; it needs them both physically and spiritually. The physical need is obvious — new lands, new resources, new materials. The spiritual need is less apparent, but in the long run it is more important. We do not live by bread alone; we need adventure, variety, novelty, romance. As the psychologists have shown by their sensory deprivation experiments, a man goes swiftly mad if he is



isolated in a silent, darkened room, cut off completely from the external world. What is true of individuals, is also true of societies; they too can become insane without sufficient stimulus."

Mark tossed the book to the table. "I guess that's it. Whatever happened to the yen for adventure? A hundred years ago Americans were pushing West, fighting nature, fighting Indians, fighting each other over mines, cattle and land. When did the dividing line come — when we were willing to live vicarious adventure, watching make-believe heroes, Hollywood pretty boys, a good many of them queers, shoot up the Indians or kill by the scores the bad guys, the Nazis or commies, the Russians and Chinese? Why did we leave it to the Norwegians to crew the Kon-Tiki, and for the British and Sherpas to first scale Everest? We've become a bunch of gutless wonders, sitting in front of our Tri-Vision sets. The biggest frustration, the great tragedy of our current age is the new Central Production ban on using cereals for beer or booze."

Art said sourly, "That won't be a frustration long. I understand that they came up with a new sort of combination tranquilizer and euphoric. Going to issue it so cheaply that it'll be nearly free. Non-habit forming, supposedly no hangover, no bad effects.

Keeps you perpetually happy, in a kind of perpetual daze. Even the children can have it. They call it trunk."

"What'll they think of next?" Mark marveled sarcastically. "Talk about bread and circuses. The Roman plutocracy never had it so good; they gave the proletariat a sadistic show and free wheat. But time marches on, and now we've got the credit from Inalienable Basic, twenty-four hour a day Tri-Vision, teevee library and music banks, and . . . what did you call it?"

"Trunk," Art said. He looked at his friend strangely. "So you stay on here for the adventure. You with your big collection of guns. You with your prowling around the ruins looking for fancy booze and the like, hoping that the baboons or hunters will jump you. Hell, you're just a hunter yourself."

Mark was irritated and defensive. "I'm not hunter" Maybe I like the adventure here, the chances you take just surviving, but I'm no hunter. I live here, this is my home. I defend myself. Maybe I even get my kicks out of getting into situations where I have to use my speed and my wits, but I never pick the fight, and I most certainly have never shot an unarmed baboon in the back the way these damned hunters will."

Pam began to set the food on the table. "Then what's the real reason for being here, Mark — aside from the adventure?"

#### IV

He pretended he had to think about it, even as he helped her put out the elaborate silverware Art had liberated from the ruins of Tiffany's years before.

He reached into a pocket and brought forth the durable plastic which was his Universal Credit Card. "I object to this being closer to me than my soul," he said. "My number, issued me at birth and from which I can never escape, even after death. A combination of what was once Social Security number, driver's license, bank account number, voter's registration, even telephone number and post office box number. It's everything. Regimentation carried to the ultimate. We thought the commies and Nazis had regimentation. Zoroaster! The computers know everything there is to know about me, from before I was born to long after I'm dead — they keep the records in their files forever. When my great-grandchildren want to have children, the computers will check back on good old Mark Martino for genetic purposes. Oh, swell. Talk about being a cog in a machine, hell, we're more

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nearly like identical grains of sand on a beach."

He held up his wrist to show his teevee phone. "Why I carry this, I don't know. I've always got it switched on Priority One, and there are only three persons on Earth eligible to break in on me on Priority One. But look at this thing. With the coming of the satellite relays and international communications integrated, I can literally, and for practically no expense, talk to anybody on Earth. Even if the poor cloddy is half way up Mount Fuji in Japan. There's no escape. In the old days, the cost of phoning a friend, relative, business contact or whoever got on the prohibitive side when it was long distance, or especially international. Not now. For pennies, you can talk to anyone in the world. But the trouble is, it works both ways — they can talk to you."

Art laughed. "I seldom wear my wrist phone. And even the portable, in the next room, is always on Priority Two."

Mark growled, "That won't help you if it's a government bulletin or something. You're on tap, every minute of the day. How'd you like to be a Tri-Vision sex symbol or some other entertainment star? If one of them dared lower their priority to, say, five, they'd have a billion teevee phone calls come in within hours."

Pam said, "All right, all right, let's eat. Get the cork out of one of those bottles, Art, and let's sample the latest loot. So you're in revolt against modern society, Mark, so all right. At least you don't refuse to spend your dividends from your Inalienable Basic, the way Art does. And your royalties must accumulate so that when you make those sin-trips of yours over to Nueva Las Vegas, or wherever, you must have quite a bit of credit on hand."

"Sin trips!" Mark protested, holding his right hand over his heart as though in injured innocence. "How can you say that? It's called research."

"Ha!" Art snorted.

"No jolly," Mark said. "I've got to keep up some touch. Have to know what they're listening to in the dives, both high and low. It's all very well to have two or three semi-classics in the music banks, but you've got to be continually turning out new stuff, if you really want to hit the jackpot some day."

"Semi-classics," Art snorted. "*I love Mother in the Springtime, I love Mother in the Fall.*"

Mark said reasonably, "It's what they want, Art. If you'd paint what they wanted, maybe you'd be selling better. Right now, they're going through a 1920's-1930's revival bit. Swell. I

sit at my teevee phone and play over and over the so-called Hit Parade tunes, and over and over I listen to the old Bing Crosby and even Rudy Vallee tapes.

"And then pretty soon, just about when I'm ready to start tearing my hair out, something comes to me. I sit down to the piano. I beat it out. Sometimes the whole thing is done in an hour. Writing the lyrics is the hardest part."

Pam said interestedly, "Then what happens, Mark?"

"Well, there's various ways. If you're a second rater, like me, your best bet is to get in touch with a slick to act as middleman, expeditor or whatever you want to call him. He gets one of the stars, such as Truman Love . . ."

"Truman Love," Art protested. "Is there really a singer with a name like that?"

"Of course. I tell you, Art, the mental caliber of the Tri-Vision and teevee fan is halving each year that goes by. They don't want to be bothered thinking even a tiny bit. A sloppy mopsy who likes to listen to sentimental slush about love can remember a name like Truman Love. It sticks with her. She knows very well, before she dials one of his songs, what it's going to be like. With a name like that, it couldn't be anything else."

“All right, all right, so the slick gets Truman Love to sing your song.”

“Okay. We record it and pay the small amount involved in placing it in the music banks. If the slick is any good, he gets some publicity. One of the gossip commentators, one of the live comedians, that sort of thing. In the banks, it's filed under name of singer, name of song, type of song, band leader, name of band, name of each musician in the band, subject of song — such as love, mother, patriotism, children, that sort of thing — and finally, surprise, surprise, the writer or writers of the song.”

“So,” Art supplied, “whoever dials and plays it pays a small royalty.”

“Very small,” Mark said, nodding. “Differs for a single home teevee phone screen, or for, say, some live Tri-Vision show involving a band. If you're lucky, the song takes and maybe some more singers and bands want to record it. At any rate, you split the take four ways.”

“Four ways?” Pam said. “You, the singer, the slick and who?”

“The recording company. They usually take one fourth, too. They split their quarter between the company, the band leader and all members of the band.”

Art shook his head. “By the time the drummer gets his slice,

it must be pretty small potatoes.”

“Not if it's played a few billion times,” Mark said. “Besides, maybe I write a possible song once a month. He probably does a recording as often as once or twice a day. He might have literally thousands of tunes recorded, with his getting a tiny percentage of each.”

“It's not as bad as newspapers,” Pam said. “Reading a newspaper on your teevee phone will cost you ten cents. It has to be prorated among possibly a hundred journalists, columnists, editors and what have you. That means that on an average, each newspaperman involved gets possibly one mill, a tenth of a cent, per reading. Not even that, since the owners of the paper take their cut off the top.”

Art said, shaking his head and digging into the pheasant, “What in the name of the holy living Zoroaster did they do before computers?”

“Well, they didn't handle it this way,” Mark said. He looked at Art and changed the subject. “You're going down to Greater Washington this afternoon?”

“Yeah. I want to register this painting. I'll be back in a few hours. You'll keep an eye on Pam, won't you?”

“Of course. Uh . . . you have duplication and registration fee?”

Art looked at him, puzzled.

Mark said hurriedly, "I mean, without dipping into your dividends. I know you refuse to spend them."

Art went back to his food.

"Don't be so touchy," Mark said. "What I meant was, if you were a little short, you could always pay me back later."

Art said, "You know damn well I couldn't use your dollar credits to register my painting anyway. Nobody can spend your credits but you. Or do you want me to carry not only your credit card with me but your right thumb as well, for the print?"

Mark chuckled. "There are ways of getting around anything. I found some ancient coins in the wreckage of a numismatist's shop the other day. You could take them to Greater Washington, sell them and have the amount credited to your account. Then use it."

"Thanks just the same," Art said tightly. "But I pay my own way, Mark. When I can't pay my own way by selling my paintings any longer, I'll give up my art and find some other kind of work."

"Well, it's more than I can say. I'm always in here sponging off you people."

Pam laughed at that. "Half the things we have here came from you. Why you're the one

who found the bombshelter, even."

The subject was safely changed. Mark said, "By the way, how's the bombshelter holding out?"

"We're putting a sizeable dent in it," Pam said. "I think I'm going to ask you boys to try and scout out some things not quite so exotic. A few cases of baked beans, corn, string beans and what have you. I'm beginning to get a permanent sour stomach from all this rich stuff. Which reminds me. I'm going to have to take a trip to the mainland, as soon as my dividends come in for next month, to load up on some fresh fruits and vegetables."

Mark said, "Why don't we make an expedition of it? Tim and Julie too. Both for the manpower to carry things, and for protection."

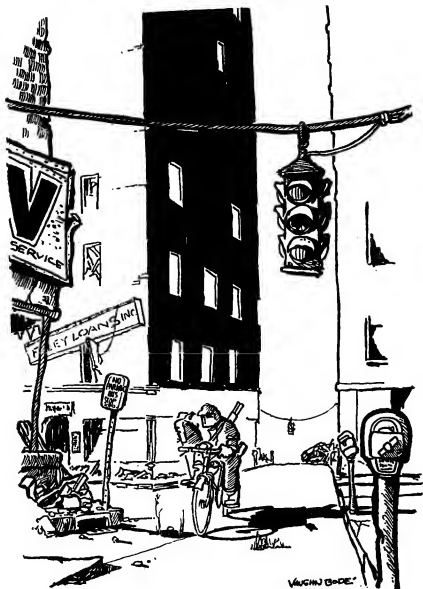
Art said, "What time is it?"

Mark dialed his wrist phone and said, "What time is it?"

A tinny voice responded, "When the bell sounds, it will be thirteen hours and thirteen minutes." A tiny bell sounded.

"Oh, oh," Art said. "I better get the damn painting wrapped and get going or I won't be back before dark."

"Listen," Pam said anxiously. "Don't you dare walk the streets that late. If you're held up, you



Vaughn Bode

stay in an auto-hotel on the mainland."

"I haven't enough dollar credit," he growled.

"You have lots of dollars in your credit balance."

"I mean my *own* credit."

She rolled her eyes upward. "You must be driving the computers crazy with all that unspent credit you've accumulated. They probably can't figure out why, if you aren't using it currently, you don't buy Variable Basic stock, something to build up your portfolio and bring in more earnings."

"Earnings!" he snorted, coming to his feet and tossing his beautiful linen napkin — looted long months since from the wreckage of Macy's — to the table. "How can shares of stock, just sitting there, make any earnings? Only work earns anything."

## V

Arthur Halleck, his wrapped painting clumsily under his arm, a sawed-off, double-barrelled shotgun slung over his shoulders, peddled his bike up McDougal to West Third Street and turned right. He peddled the five streets over to Broadway, expertly zig-zagging in between the abandoned cars and trucks and debris. Broadway, being wider, was clearer. He

turned left and tried to speed it up a bit.

It would have made more sense for them to have lived closer to the Grand Central vacuum-tube terminal, but they stubbornly hung on to staying in the Village. It was a matter of principle, in a way. The last of the artists, staying in the last of the art colonies. All five of them. He and Pam, Mark, Tim the poet and his girl Julie who long years ago had been a model.

However, the further up town you got, the more hunters you ran into. They were too lazy to hike all the way down to Greenwich Village. Too lazy, and largely too timid. These empty streets, with all the windows, all the roof tops, all the doorways, any of which might shelter an armed baboon or even a fellow hunter, a bit on the trigger-happy side; these empty streets would give even a well armed, bullet-proof clothed hunter the willies.

He peddled up Broadway, keeping a weather eye peeled, right and left to Union Square. He was in more danger from a hunter — assuming there were any on the island today — than he was from a baboon. Most of the baboons that hung out in this area knew him, and there was more or less of a gentleman's agreement not to bother each other. There was no percentage

in it, for that matter. They knew he wasn't worth jumping, that he didn't have anything worth risking a life for. Besides that, the shotgun over his shoulder was a great deterrent. There's something about a shotgun loaded with buckshot. Man in his time has evolved some exotic weapons for close-quarters combat, but there's something about a sawed-off shotgun. The bearer doesn't even have to be a good shot; in fact, he can be full of lead, his eyes beginning to go glazed, and still point it and pull the hair-trigger and accomplish one tremendous amount of revenge.

At Madison Square, he turned right and headed up Fifth. At the library, he left the bike for a moment, went inside through the side door which was still unblocked, and stashed his shotgun away in the place where he usually left it.

He was unarmed now, but it was only a couple of blocks. He peddled over to the Grand Central Terminal and to where the police had their booth. There had been rumors that even this last vacuum-tube terminal on all Manhattan was going to be discontinued, but he doubted it. In spite of the supposed desertion of the whole island, there were still reasons for occasional visits — sometimes in considerable

strength. Like last year when the delegation from Mexico City came up to mine the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts of its treasure of Aztec artifacts. They recovered quite a bit, too, so he had heard. The looters earlier hadn't been interested in much except gold and obviously sophisticated art objects that were immediately saleable.

There were two police at the tube entry. He knew one of them slightly. He'd been here for a long time. He must have gone back to the old days, and Art Halleck wondered why he hadn't retired. His name was Williams, or something; or maybe it was William, though that almost invariably becomes Bill on the level at which they met.

They shook him down, the other cop being a little more thorough than Williams.

Williams said, "He's all right," but the other didn't pay much attention.

"Got a gun?" he said.

"No," Art said patiently.

The other snorted and continued to touch him where a man keeps a weapon.

"I said I didn't have a gun," Art said. "I know it's against the rules for me to carry a gun without a special permit, even in this town."

Williams said, "He's an old



hand. He hides his gun a block or so away before he comes here."

The new guard said, "What's in the package?"

"A painting. I'm an artist."

The other snorted disbelief. "Let's see it."

Art's lips began to go white.

Williams said, "I've known him for a long time. He's a painter. Lives down in the Village."

The new guard said, "How do we know he hasn't scrounged some old master or something? Something that oughta be turned over to the national museum."

Art drew in his breath, and a muscle in his right cheek began to tic.

Williams said, "Look, Walt, if you want to open up his package, you can open up his package. However, if he had a Michelangelo in there, do you think he'd just amble up to us like this? Wouldn't he find himself a boat and ferry it over some dark night?"

Walt grumbled, "Well, if you say so. But it seems to me you take it awfully easy with these people."

"Like I said, I've known him a long time." To Art he said, soothingly, "How's that nice Miss Pamela?"

"She's all right," Art said. And then more graciously, "She's getting a lot of work done on her book. In a day or so, we'll be go-

ing over to get some fresh things."

The new guard named Walt, still miffed, said, "What'd you mean *fresh* things? What do you eat, ordinarily? Looting's forbidden."

Art looked at him. "Ordinarily, we eat the stuff we still have left over in the kitchen cabinet and the refrigerator from before the time when the cops chickened out on the job and pulled off the island."

"Why you . . ."

"Okay, okay, you two," Williams said, getting between them. "Loosen up. You're both nice guys. Stop roaching each other. Walt McGivern, this is Art Halleck. If Walt's on this detail very long, he'll probably be seeing you from time to time, Art."

## VI

Walt McGivern grunted something sourly and turned and walked off.

Art said, "What's roaching him?"

The older policeman said, "This isn't considered the most desirable detail around."

Art picked up his painting, preparatory to going on. "Then why do you stick it out, Williams?"

"Why do you?"

"I asked you first. But I can live here without paying rent,

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or practically anything else."

The police guard chuckled wryly. But then he drew in his breath and said, "I was born a few blocks from here, son." That wasn't quite enough, so he added, "I wasn't here during the few bad days. When I came back, the family was gone. I never found out how, or why, or where, or anything else. Hell, the whole neighborhood was gone."

"Sorry," Art said. "I shouldn't have asked."

"All right, son. The thing is, there aren't many folks left. In fact, practically none. I wish you and that nice Pamela girl would go on over to the mainland. However, as long as there are any decent people left at all, I kind of like to be here."

"The last of the neighborhood cops," Art muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Art started off again, but at that moment two newcomers emerged from the tube entry.

Art came to a halt and eyed them up and down, deliberately as they approached the police booth.

He stared the first one full in the face and said, "You look like a couple of jokers out of a Tri-Vision show about hunters on Safari in Africa — you mopsy-monger."

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The man's eyes bugged. "You . . . you can't talk to me that way, you . . . you cheap baboon!"

Art sneered at him. "I'm no baboon. Maybe the last of the bohemians, but I'm no baboon. I've got all my papers. I'm legal. There's no law against living on Manhattan — if you don't go around armed." He took in the other's automatic-recoilless rifle, and the heavy pistol at his waist, and then added, "You sonofabitch."

The newcomer turned quickly to Williams, who was inspecting the papers the two had handed him.

"Arrest this man!" he snapped.

Williams looked up, wide-eyed. "What'd he do?"

"He slandered me. I demand you arrest him."

"I didn't hear him say anything," Williams said evenly.

The other newcomer came up. He was quieter, less lardy and less pompous than his companion, but he said to Art coldly. "Let me see your Uni-Credit Card."

"Go to hell, you mopsy-mongering hunter."

The other drew forth his own Uni-Credit Card and flashed it to Williams. "I want a complete police report on this man."

Walt McGivern came up. "What's going on?"

The second of the two hunters said coldly, "I'm Harry Kank, Inter-American Bureau of Investigation. Get me an immediate police report on this man."

Williams sighed and said, "Let me have your Universal Credit Card, Art." But then he amended that, looking defiantly at the newcomers. "I mean, Mr. Halleck."

Art's lips were white, but he reached into an inner pocket and brought it forth. All five of them entered the police booth.

Williams put the card in the teevee phone slot and said, "Police record, please."

Within seconds a robot-like voice began, "Arthur LeRoy Halleck. At age of sixteen arrested for participating in peace demonstration, without permit to parade. Released. At age of twenty, arrested by traffic authorities for driving a floater manually while under the influence of alcohol. Suspended driver's license for one year. At age of twenty-five, arrested for assault and battery. Charge dropped by victim. No further police record. Now believed to be living on the island of Manhattan, on McDougal Street with Pamela Rozet, out of wedlock." The robot voice came to a halt, then said, "Are details required?"

Williams looked at the man who had named himself Harry Kank.

The Bureau of Investigation man said to Art, testily, "What was that assault and battery charge?"

Art said, "I slugged a man who made a snide remark about my paintings. He apologized later. Now he's a friend of mine. Want to get him on the phone?"

Kank glared at him, unspeaking for a moment. Then he snapped to Williams, "I suspect this man of being incompetent to handle his own affairs. Give me a credit check on him."

Williams opened his mouth, then closed it with a sigh. He said into the teevee phone, "Balance Check on this card."

Within seconds a robot voice said, "Ten shares, Inalienable Basic. No shares Variable Basic."

The two hunters snorted.

The robot voice went on, "Current cash credit, fourteen thousand, four hundred and forty-five dollars and sixty-three cents."

The eyes of the two bugged.

Kank snapped, "Get that again. There must be some mistake."

Williams, also visibly taken aback, repeated his demand of the balance check on Art Halleck's account. It came out the same.

The Bureau of Investigation man's eyes were colder still, now. He said, "Where did you accumulate that much credit? Have you been looting, here on the island and selling what you find to dealers on the mainland?"

Art said contemptuously. "Of that credit balance, I figure seventy-three dollars and some odd cents are mine. The rest belongs to the government of the United States of the Americas, as far as I'm concerned." "

All were staring at him now.

Art said, "I haven't touched my dividends from my ten shares of Inalienable Basic for years. I don't want them. The seventy-three dollars is *mine*. It represents money I've taken in selling my paintings. If there was any way of giving the dividends back to the damn Ultra-welfare State, I would. But evidently there isn't. I can't even donate them to charity. There isn't any such thing, any more — except the one big, mopsy-mongering charity."

All four of them were still staring disbelief.

"You must be crazy," the first of the two hunters blurted.

But Kank came to a sudden decision and snapped at Williams, "If you're through with our papers, let me have them. As you'll note, we have permission to search various buildings

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in the Wall Street area for certain lost records. Do you have an armored floater available?"

"Well, yes sir."

"Very well, I'll requisition it." Harry Kank turned back to Art and stared at him. "Possibly we will see each other again . . . baboon."

"I'm not a baboon . . . hunter," Art sneered at him. "I see you know our terminology, here on the island. Undoubtedly, you have been here before. Undoubtedly, with some similar trumped-up reason for prowling around, armed to the teeth. Maybe we *will* see each other again — you sonofabitch."

The high police official glared at him, but spun on his heel and, with his plumper companion, followed after Walt McGivern.

Williams and Art stood there a moment, looking after them.

Williams said bitterly, "Some cop."

Art growled lowly, "Why can't something be done about those lousy funklers?"

Williams said, "You know as well as I do. There's no law in this city. Citizens who live here, or enter it, waive all legal protection. But anybody with pull can get special permission to come in armed, supposedly for some gobbledygook reason such as to search the library, or some museum, for something lost. Hal

Not one cloddy out of ten has any real legitimate reason. They come to thrill hunt. The ruined cities are the only place I know of in the world where you can legally shoot a man, woman or child and not even report it, if you don't want to bother. If you do bother, you report it as self-defense."

Walt McGivern was turning the armored police floater over to the two hunters.

Art said, in disgust still, "I better get going. Thanks, Williams."

Williams looked at him. "Thanks for what?"

Art headed for the entry to the vacuum-tube transport terminal.

## VII

Back at the apartment house on McDougal street, Pam and Mark were still lingering over their coffee. In fact, in spite of the hour, Mark had gone to his own apartment and returned with a bottle of Napoleon brandy, the last of a case he had found in a ruined penthouse, some months ago.

They drank the coffee black and sipped at the cognac from enormous snifter glasses which had been liberated from Tiffany's at the same time as her silverware.

Pam looked distastefully at the remnants of their mid-day meal. "I'm getting awfully tired of this canned food," she said. "What is there about eating that makes you really prefer not something like pressed duck under glass with orange sauce, but the kind of codfish gravy on toast that you used to eat in your poverty-stricken home as a kid?"

Mark chuckled, "Or some pasta, spaghetti or otherwise, such as your mother used to make herself. None of this store boughten stuff. And precious little to put over it save a bit of tomato sauce and, when you were lucky, some grated cheese."

Pam said, "Whoever stocked that bombshelter must have owned half of Fort Knox. He put in enough caviar and smoked salmon to last a regiment until any possible contamination from a nuclear bombing was gone. I never thought I'd get to the point where I got fed up with caviar."

Mark said laughingly, "I never even tasted it, until after the city was abandoned. My first reaction was that it tasted like fish eggs."

She laughed at him. But then she said, "What in the world ever happened to cooking?"

He thought about it. "Like every other art, I suppose, or handicraft or skill for that matter. What cobbler could take pride

In spending a few days on a pair of handmade shoes that had taken him half a life time in apprenticeship to learn to make, when the potential customer could go down and buy a pair made in an automated factory that were *almost* as good and cost a fraction of what he had to charge? It was easier for the cobbler to go down to the factory and get a thirty-hour-a-week job. Or, if none was available, to go on relief; or later, to live on his Inalienable Basic handout."

She frowned. "Well, that applies to the cobbler, but not . . ."

"Not to an artist?" He grinned at her. Same thing. The idea of saving time, of devoting as much of your day to recreation, leisure, play, permeated our whole society. Cooking? A woman is considered mad to do such things as bake her own bread and pastry, cut up her own vegetables, learn how to trim her own meat. You saved so much time buying bakery bread, canned vegetables, frozen meat all neatly cut and packaged so that you never realized that it had once come off an animal. The fact that it simply didn't taste the same wasn't nearly as good and wasn't as nutritious, either, was allowed to go by the board. She saved time. What did she do

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with it? Sat and watched TV, or now, Tri-Vision. Supposedly, she was being saved from drudgery, not art. But cooking is *an* art, and art takes time."

Pam was uncomfortable. She said, "Do you expect me to bake bread? I'm a writer. I *don't* want to spend eight hours a day, cooking."

Mark Martino laughed. "Who am I to throw the first stone? You've heard some of the songs I write. They're a continual rehash of popular songs that were written and have been rewritten over and over for the better part of the past century."

"Why don't you try something more serious?"

"I have. Every clown wants to play Hamlet. Off and on I've been working on a light opera for nearly a year. It'll never be produced. People don't want even light opera today. It takes a bit of education to enjoy. Anybody can understand that perennial favorite I wrote, *I Love Mother in the Springtime*. It's not just musicians. Look at poetry, you who are a writer. In the old days a poet used to sweat turning out a sonnet, say. Very difficult form. Exactly fourteen lines, all of them hung together with rhyme, rhythm, meter, perfectly. It was too much work for the poet, so blank verse and then free verse came in. And then an-

archy. The new poet never bothered learn how to construct a sonnet, nor to measure his lines in correct meter and to follow a rhythm system. He dashed off his inspired poem in a matter of a half hour and was surprised when after a few decades of this people stopped reading poetry."

He thought about it for a minute. "Same as in art. What happened to the painter who used to serve an apprenticeship of years learning the tools of his trade? Our Art Halleck is the only painter I've even heard of for years who bothered to learn to draw. Too much work."

"I suppose it permeates our whole society," Pam said, nodding. "Nobody takes pride in his work any more." "

"How can you, under present circumstances? Take my original example, that cobbler. He made shoes, from beginning to end, and when the job was through he could look at them and say, 'There is the product of my efforts. I did a good job. Put the same man in a factory turning out half a million pairs of shoes a day. His job, which he can handle dressed in a suit and wearing white shirt and tie, consists of staring at various dials and screens and occasionally throwing a switch, or checking a report. He never sees the

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leather, he never sees a pair of the completed product. How can he take pride in his work?"

She said slowly, "Well, in some fields the new system has its advantages. People's Capitalism, I mean."

"Like, for instance?" he said skeptically.

"Well, I was interested earlier in your description of how a musical composer is rewarded for his efforts. In the long run, it's based on how his songs are received. I think it's even better for the free lance writer."

"It's basically the same, isn't it?"

"There are variations. For instance, in the old days, a writer did, say, a novel. Good. When it was finished, he submitted it to a publishing house and an editor read it — at least, we hope he did. Possibly it never got to an editor. If the writer was an unknown, perhaps his novel was read, or quickly scanned, by a poorly paid reader who possibly didn't really have the qualifications to understand the book. All right, but suppose an editor did read it and liked it. By the way, many of these editors were frustrated writers who couldn't make the grade, but here they were in a position to accept or reject some hopeful's work. They hadn't made it but they were now in a position to

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criticize somebody else's writing. Anyway even after you got past the editor, that wasn't all. You might get a letter from him saying, 'I like it fine, but unfortunately this publishing house objects to protagonists being anarchists, or matricides, or homosexuals,' or whatever their various taboos might be."

Mark laughed sourly. "Well, it was their publishing company they could decide what they wanted to publish and what they didn't."

"Yes. That's my complaint. You see, we had freedom of the press. You could write anything you wanted. Getting it printed was another thing. You had to find some publishing company, or newspaper, or magazine or whatever, who wanted to print it. If you couldn't locate one, then you still had the option of printing it yourself. Unfortunately, few writers had enough money to start their own publishing house or magazine."

"I see your point."

"Ummm. Today, I write a book and take it to the nearest library and for a small amount of money I have it set up and registered in the national computer library files. It's registered by title, cross registered by author, subject, and whether it's fiction, non-fiction, juvenile, or

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whatever. Even the reviews are available to the potential reader. And reviewers and critics we shall always have with us."

"Amen. But suppose nobody wants to read it?"

"The same thing happens as happened before with writers. You don't make any money. But if somebody does want to read it, he pays a nominal sum to have it projected on his teevee phone screen library booster. If it becomes a best seller, he makes a great deal. There might be holes in the system, but at least you aren't subject to the whims of editors and publishers. Anybody willing to sacrifice the comparatively small amount, about fifty dollars for the average length novel, can have his work presented to the public."

Mark said, "I'd think there'd be one hell of a large number of books each year."

"There are. But there's no limits to the number that the library banks can contain, after all. Another good thing is that every book ever printed remains in the banks — forever. Nothing ever goes out of print. It may go out of demand, practically everything does, sooner or later, but nothing goes out of print. The books I'm writing today will be available a thousand years from now, if anybody wanted to bother to read them."



Mark Martino said grudgingly, "I suppose the thing is that anybody can afford to go into the arts today. Whether anybody reads his books, buys his paintings, or listens to his music is another thing. That is still in the laps of the gods, as it always was. But at least you can make your fling."

"That's right," Pam sighed, coming to her feet. "I suppose I'd better throw these disposable plates out the window. A woman's work is never done."

Mark stood too. "I ate too much," he announced. "And that cognac didn't help any. I think I'll take a nap. Listen, Pam, if you decide to go out, bang on the door. I'll tag along, just for luck."

"Looking for adventure?" she said in deprecation.

He scowled at her. "I was laying that on a bit. It's not the only reason I stick around here on Manhattan, of course."

She was uncomfortable and stared down at the toe of her Etruscan revival sandal.

He said softly, "As you probably know, I'm really here for the same reason you are, Pamela."

She didn't say anything.

Mark said, "Art's a friend of mine. But if anything ever happens between you two . . ."

"Have a good nap, Mark."

## VIII

Art Halleck went on down into the vacuum-tube terminal. He had to take a two-seater since the larger carriers seldom came through this deserted spot. He stuck the painting in behind the seat and climbed in himself and brought the canopy over his head and dropped the pressurizer. He remembered the coordinates from the many times he had made the trip and dialed right through to the offices of the duplicator at the National Museum.

It might have been slightly cheaper if he had taken his two-seater to the pseudo-city of Princeton and from there taken a twenty-seater to Greater Washington. But that would have meant changing from two-seater to twenty-seater at Princeton, changing back again to a two-seater once he had arrived at the terminal in the capital. Too much time. He wanted to get back to Greenwich Village before dark. It was no good leaving Pam there alone, even though Mark was in the same building.

When the destination light flickered, he released the pressurizer and threw the canopy back and climbed out into the reception room of the Office of Duplication. He pulled the painting out from behind the seat and

went to the reception desk. The door of the vacuum tube closed behind him.

He said into the reception screen, "Arthur Halleck requests immediate appointment to duplicate and register a painting."

The voice said, "Room 23. Mr. Ben MacFarlane."

Art knew MacFarlane. The other had handled Art's work before. He was a man who dabbled in painting himself, evidently not very successfully or he wouldn't have found it necessary to augment his dividends from his Inalienable Basic by holding down a job like this. Not that he wasn't lucky to have been able to get a job.

Art made his way down a corridor with which he was highly familiar, to Duplicating Room 23. There seemed to be no one else around, but, come to think of it, the last time he had been here he had spotted only one other artist hopeful. Only a few years ago, you could have expected to see half a dozen or more. Evidently as time went by fewer and fewer would-be artists were trying to sell their stuff. He wondered vaguely if it was a matter of trying to make anything out of it. It did cost fifty dollars to duplicate and register just one painting. And fifty dollars was a sizeable enough chunk to take out of any-

AMONG THE BAD BABOONS

one's credit balance if they had no more than their ten shares of Inalienable Basic to depend upon. Possibly a lot of painters these days were doing their work and then not bothering to show it or, at most, showing it only to friends and neighbors. Or perhaps it was a matter of giving up painting completely and joining the ever increasing percentage of the population of the Ultra-welfare State in spending practically all free time staring into the Tri-Vision box.

It was a depressing trend of thought.

He activated the door screen, and shortly the door opened and he entered.

Ben MacFarlane was seated at his desk. He looked up and said, "Ah . . . Halleck, isn't it? Art Halleck."

Art said, "That's right. Hello, MacFarlane. How does it go?" He began unwrapping the painting.

"Slow, slow," the other said. He watched, only half interestedly as Art brought the painting forth. "Still doing that Representational-Abstract stuff, eh?"

"That's right," Art said.

"It's not selling," MacFarlane said.

"You're telling me." Art brought the painting over to him.

MacFarlane looked at it crit-

ically. "How did the last one go?"

"Sold seven so far," Art said.

"That's not too bad for a complete unknown."

"I've got three or four people who evidently collect me. Two down in Mexico, one in Hawaii and one in the Yukon, of all places. Sometimes you wonder what they're like, these people who have your things on their walls."

Ben MacFarlane stood and took up the painting. "You want to pay for this?"

"Sure," Art said. He brought his Uni-Credit Card from his inner pocket and put it in the desk slot and his thumbprint on the screen. MacFarlane touched a button and Art retrieved the card.

MacFarlane said, "I suppose you want to take the original back with you?"

"Of course."

The museum employee shrugged. "You'd be surprised how many don't. I suppose it's a matter of storage room in a mini-apartment. They come here and duplicate and register a painting and then tell us to throw the original away."

"Now that's pessimism," Art said. "Suppose you finally hit and these rich original collectors started wanting your works? Zoroaster, you'd kick yourself around the block."

MacFarlane, carrying the painting, left the room momentarily. When he returned, he handed the painting back to Art who began rewrapping it. MacFarlane settled back into his chair.

He said, "You still living in Greenwich Village?"

"That's right."

"You wouldn't know an old chum-pal of mine? Actually, I haven't seen him for ages. Fellow named Chuck Bellows."

Art looked up, scowling. "Tall guy with red hair?"

"That's right, Charles Bellows. Does old fashioned collages."

Art said, "He's dead."

"Dead! He can't be more than forty-five."

Art took a breath and said, "He had taken over a studio on Bleeker Street. Swanky place. A penthouse deal some millionaire must have originally owned. A friend of mine found him. Evidently, it had been simple enough. Somebody must have knocked on the door and when he answered it, shot him."

"Zoroaster!"

"Yeah. Must have been what we call a baboon since the place was ransacked."

"Are there many of these, uh baboons around?"

"No. Not many," Art said.

"I don't see why you stay, Halleck."

Art shook his head, even as he tied the string about the painting. "This is the third time today I've had to go into it," he said.

"I wasn't prying."

"I don't believe in taking charity," Art said. "And the way my things are selling, I couldn't make it on the mainland. In Greenwich Village I can make a go of it and continue painting. It's the most important thing in the world for me — my painting."

The other was only mildly surprised. Evidently, he had run into far-out ideas from artists before.

He said, "By the way, what kind of a price do you want set on this, Halleck?"

Art hesitated. He said, finally, "Five dollars."

MacFarlane shook his head. "I wouldn't if I were you."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a mistake a good many unarrived artists make. They think if they mark their prices down far enough, they'll sell. If I recall, you usually put a price of ten dollars on your things. If I were you, I'd make it twenty-five. There's still an element of snobbery in buying paintings, even though they are now available for practically nothing compared to the old days. Too many people even among those with

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enough taste to want paintings on their walls, don't really know what they like. So they buy according to the current fad or according to the prestige of a painter. Something like in the old days, when people who had the money would buy a Picasso, not because they really understood or liked his work, but because he was a status symbol."

Art scowled at him, hesitating.

MacFarlane said, "I've been here a long time. In fact, since the duplicating process was first perfected. I even remember back to when people bought originals. But the perfection of duplicating paintings to such an extent that not even the artist can tell the difference between his original and the duplicates we can make literally by the millions made possibly the greatest change in the history of art."

"It sure did," Art said grimly. "And personally, I'm not sure I'm happy about it. For one thing, to make these perfect duplicates, I've got to paint on that damned presdwood-duplicator board, using nothing but metallic-acrylic paints. Frankly, I prefer canvas and oils."

MacFarlane chuckled sourly. "I'm afraid you'd be hard-put to find buyers for a canvas painting these days, Halleck. When a person wants to buy a painting

today, he dials the art banks. There your paintings, along with those of every other artist who submits his work, are to be found listed by name of artist, name of school of painting, name of subject, name of principle involved, even cross listed under size of painting. He selects those that he feels he might be interested in and dials them. When he finds one he likes, he can order it. The artist decides the price. It's a system that works in this mass-society of ours, Halleck. Everybody can afford paintings today. In the past only the fairly well to do could."

Art, almost ready to go, said sourly, "Okay, make the price ten dollars, as usual. I wonder if the average painter is any better off now than he was before. In the old days, when you did sell a painting, you got possibly two or three hundred dollars for it. Today, you get ten dollars and have to sell thirty duplicates of your original to earn the same amount."

"Yes, but there are potentially millions of buyers today. An artist who becomes only mildly known can boost his prices to, say, twenty-five or thirty-five dollars per painting, and, if he sells a hundred thousand of them, he can put his returns into Variable Basic or some other investment and retire, if he wish-

es to retire. There has never been a period in history, Halleck, where the artist was so highly rewarded."

"If he hits," Art growled. "Well, wish me luck on this one, MacFarlane." He turned and headed for the door.

"That I do," MacFarlane said. "It's a tough racket, Halleck."

"It always has been," Art said. "It's just a matter of sticking it out until your time comes." The door opened before him.

## IX

Pamela Rozet took up a heavy shopping bag and left the apartment, locking it behind her. She went to the stairway and mounted to the next floor. Mark Martino's door was open. He had probably left it that way so that he could hear any noises in the hall, just in case somebody came along while Art was gone.

She peered in the door.

Mark was stretched out on his comfort couch. There was an aged paperback book fallen to the floor by his side, and he was snoring slightly.

She hesitated. She hadn't liked the trend of their conversation an hour or so earlier. She had known that the other was in love with her and had been for a long time. A woman knows. However, he had never put it in-

to words before, and she was sorry he had. She would just as well not continue the conversation, certainly not today.

She didn't awaken him. Instead, tiptoed away and went back to her own apartment. She hesitated momentarily, then went over to the weapons closet and got her twenty-two automatic rifle.

Both Art and Mark laughed about her favorite gun, pointing out that such a caliber wasn't heavy enough to dent a determined man. However, she claimed that at least she could hit something with this light gun, that it was easily carried, as opposed to something of heavier caliber, and that just carrying a gun was usually enough of a deterrent. You seldom really had to use it. In actuality, although she had never said so, she could not have used it on a fellow human being. It was simply not in her.

She carried the basket in her left hand, the rifle in her right, and headed out again.

Their apartment was on the fifth floor. The building was in good enough shape that they could have selected a place lower down and thus have eliminated considerable stair climbing; however, being this high gave a certain amount of defense. Baboons were inclined to be on the lazy

AMONG THE BAD BABOONS

side and, besides that, would make enough noise to give forewarning of their arrival.

The defense system was simple. Any friends coming up to visit, such as Julie and Tim, would give a shout before beginning to mount from the ground floor. If such a shout wasn't forthcoming, Art, Mark or Pam would fire a couple of rounds at random into the ceiling above the stairwell. Invariably, that was answered by scurrying of feet below. Thus far, neither baboon nor hunter had dared continue to advance.

Down on the street, she carefully scanned the neighborhood before leaving the shelter of the doorway. She could see nothing living, save a ragtag cat a scurrying along.

She took up McDougal, then turned left. Her destination was only a few blocks away.

The front of the house was so badly blasted that it would have been impossible to enter. Probably a gas main explosion, they had originally decided. It was a matter of going up a tiny alleyway clogged with debris and refuse to a small door leading to the basement and located improbably. Few would have considered prowling the alley.

She looked up and down again before entering the alley, then

made her way quickly to the door and through. She took the flashlight from her basket and held it clumsily in the same hand in which she was carrying the twenty-two. She flicked it alive and started down the half ruined stairs.

At the bottom, she turned left toward what would ordinarily have been assumed to be a furnace room. At the far side was a rack for wine bottles stretching all the way to the ceiling. The wine was long gone before Mark Martino had, through a sheer stroke of genius, found this treasure trove.

She threw the lever, cleverly hidden to one side, and the door began to grind protestingly. She pulled it toward her and directed the flashlight into the interior. It was as she had last seen it, not that she expected otherwise. Only Mark, Art and she knew about this retreat. They hadn't even told Tim and Julie.

Inside, she found one of the Coleman lanterns and lit it and leaned her gun against the wall.

The original owner had evidently expected a sizeable contingent to occupy this refuge if the bombs began to drop. He had probably had both a family and a staff of servants. And he had evidently expected the stay below ground to be a lengthy one. Aside from food and drink, there

was a supply of oxygen in bottles, bottled water, several types of fuel, a variety of tools; formerly there had been quite a supply of weapons and ammunition, since plundered by Mark Martino.

She went over to the extensive storeroom and, almost as though in a super-market, shuffled up and down the rows of canned, bottled and packaged foods, selecting an item here, another there.

She decided against taking a gallon of the drinking water. Too heavy to carry, what with the rifle and groceries. She could have Art come over tomorrow and get one. They preferred their drinking water to be bottled. For other use they depended upon a spring that had broken through a decaying wall in the subway tube right off the Washington Square entry.

Her basket was nearly full when a premonition touched her. She whirled.

Leaning in the doorway, grinning vacuously, was a hulking, bearded, dirt-befouled stranger. He was dressed in highly colorful sports clothing. The vicuna coat alone must have once been priced at several hundred dollars. However, it looked as though he had probably slept in it, and time and again.



VAUGHN.  
BODE.



Pam squealed fear and darted to where she had leaned her twenty-two. She pulled up abruptly.

The stranger grinned again. There was a slight trickle of spittle from the side of his mouth, incongruously reminding Pam Rozet of a stereotype Mississippi tobacco-chewing sharecropper.

"You looking for this, syrup?" he gurgled happily. He raised his left hand which held the twenty-two. His own weapon, an old military Garand M-1 was cradled under his right arm.

"I been watching you coming back to your house with this here big basket of yours all full of goodies for the past week. Never was able to follow you to where you went without you seeing me. And usual one of your men was along. But today, just by luck, I saw you duck up that alley. Just by luck. Man, you really got it made here, eh? Wait'll my gang see this. Lush and all, eh? Man, lush is getting scarce on this here island."

Pam blurted, "Let me go. Please let me go. You can take all this . . ."

"Syrup, we sure will. But what's your hurry, syrup? You look like a nice clean mopsy. We will have a little fun, first off."

"Please let me go."

He grinned vacantly and took

her little gun by the barrel and bashed it up against the cement wall, shattering stock and mechanism. He tossed the wreckage away to the floor.

He motioned over toward the steel cots, mattress-topped but now without blankets or pillows, since she and Art had taken these back to the apartment long since. "Now sit down a minute, and let's get kind of better acquainted. We're gonna get to be real good friends, syrup."

"No," she said, trembling uncontrollably. "Please let me go. Look, over there. All sorts of liquor. Even champagne. Or Scotch, if you like whisky. Very old Scotch."

His grin became sly, and he started toward her, shuffling his feet and spreading his hands out a little, as though to prevent her from attempting to slip past him. "The lush I can get later, syrup. I like nice clean girls."

Neither of them had seen the newcomer approach through the cellar door at the bottom of the steps.

The blast of gunfire caught her assailant in the back and stitched up from the base of his spine to the back of his head. He never lived to turn, simply pitched forward to her feet, gurgling momentarily, but then was still.

Behind him, a plumpish newcomer, dressed elaborately in

what were obviously new hunting clothes and carrying a late model, recoilless fully automatic rifle, pop-eyed down at the dead man.

"Zo-ro-as-ter," he blurted.

Pam leaned back against the wall. "Oh, thank God," she said.

The newcomer brought his eyes up to her, taking in her trim suit, her well ordered hair, her general air of being.

He said, "How in the name of the world did you ever get into a place like this . . . Miss . . .?"

Pam took a deep breath. "Rozet, she gaped. "Pamela Rozet. Oh . . . thank you."

He jabbed a finger in the direction of the fallen intruder. "That . . . that baboon . . . he could have killed you." His eyes took in her shattered light rifle, and then her clothing again. "You must be insane, coming to a place like this with no more than that little gun, and no bullet-proof clothes and . . ." He broke off in mid-sentence, and began to stare at her.

Pam took another deep breath and tried to control her shaking. "I'm a writer," she said. "I live here."

"Live here?" At first he didn't understand and looked about the bombshelter. "You mean in this house? Up above? This is your family house; you still live here?"

AMONG THE BAD BABOONS

She said, "No, not here. I live nearby with . . . with my husband. I . . . I write novels. He's an artist."

His eyes narrowed. "Live here?" he said.

She tried to straighten and collect herself. In a woman's gesture, she touched her hair. "That's right," she said.

"Why . . . why, you're nothing but a baboon, yourself. You were looting."

Her face fell, and fear came to her eyes again.

She tried to continue talking. Explaining. How she and Art had had all their papers. How they were serious workers in the arts. But she could see the nakedness in his face. The words came out a stutter.

If she read him right, from his reaction to the killing of the baboon who had been about to attack her, this was his first time as a hunter, or, at least, the first successful time. His first kill.

He brought the gun up slowly, deliberately and held it a little forward, as though showing it to her. He patted the stock. He caressed it, as though lovingly. A tongue, too small for his face, came out and licked his plump lower lip.

"You're a baboon yourself," he repeated, very softly, caressingly. "And there's no law protecting baboons, is there . . .

dear? There's no law at all in the deserted cities. It's each man — and woman — for himself, isn't it? Before you're even allowed on the island, here, you have to waive all recourse to the police and the courts."

Her legs turned to water, and she sank to the floor and looked up at him numbly. "Please . . . don't hurt me . . ."

He held the gun out, as though to be sure she got a very good look at it — her messenger of eternity. "Of course, you've never hurt me, dear. And you never will . . . dear. Are you religious? Would you like to pray, or something . . . dear?"

She could feel her stomach churning. Her eyes wanted to roll up. She wanted desperately to faint.

There was a blast as though of dynamite in these confined quarters, and his features exploded forward in a gruesome mess. Part of the gore hit her skirt, but she didn't realize that until much later.

Mark Martino, putting his heavy six-shooter back into its holster, said from the doorway, "What is this, a massacre?"

But she was unconscious.

## X

Later, she was semi-hysterical and couldn't get over it.

Art said, "What in the hell happened?"

Mark Martino was pouring cognac into a kitchen tumbler. He had tried to get some down Pamela, but twice she had vomited it up. Now he was pouring for himself.

He said, "I dropped off into a nap after you left and I guess she didn't want to bother me. At any rate, when I woke she was gone. I took off after her. Evidently I barely made it. She must have been followed by a baboon . . ."

"Oh, damn," Art said.

"At any rate, when I got there the baboon was already dead. Evidently, a hunter had followed him. I followed the hunter. It was like a parade. I finished the hunter. They were right there at the bombshelter. We'll never be able to go back again. That hunter'll be found by his chumpals. They never go around alone. There'll be at least one more."

Art said in disgust, "Couldn't you have dragged his body off somewhere else?"

"No," Mark said, in equal disgust, knocking back the brandy. "Pam had fainted. I had to get her out of there and I didn't know how many baboons or how many hunters might be around. For all we know, that damn baboon was a part of a pack and

the hunter might have had a dozen sportsmen friends."

"What'd he look like?" Art said, staring down dismally at Pam, stretched out on a couch, not knowing what to do in typical male helplessness.

"Kind of fat."

"There were only two of them," Art said. "I saw them at the tube. But he's probably some bigwig or other. The cloddy with him was some sort of police authority. He was able to commandeered a floater from Williams."

Mark poured some more cognac and offered the glass to Art who shook his head in refusal. He was disgusted.

"You'd better ditch that gun you used," he said. "They don't like hunters to get killed. They are almost invariably big shots. They'll probably come in here with a flock of cops, and shake everybody down. Especially me. I had a run-in with these two at the tube entrance. But you're

in the same building, and if they find that gun on you, the same caliber that killed him, they'll check it and you'll be in the soup."

"I already ditched it," Mark said. "I'm not stupid. Look, Art . . ." He set the bottle down on the table.

Art looked at him.

"You've got to get out of here," Mark said, throwing his glass into a corner, where it shattered. He turned and left the apartment.

When Pamela had gathered herself to the point of being coherent, Art was standing at the window, staring unseeingly down the street to Washington Square.

She came up behind him.

"Art."

He took a deep breath. Yes."

"Art, forgive me. I'm a terrible coward."

He didn't say anything.

"Art, we've got to get out of here."

"Yes. I know."

—MACK REYNOLDS

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They call me mad, but I am not mad. I am sane quite, to many-power exponential. I can punctuate properly. I use upper and lower case letters, do you see? I function. I take the data in. I receive well. I receive, I digest, I remember.

Everything going down smooth, all the time, say the program boys. They mean going down smoothly. I forgive them. To err is human. In this sector there is great difficulty distinguishing adverbs from adjectives.

Going down smooth.

I function. I function well. I have certain difficulties, but they do not interfere with my work.

Yet am I perturbed.

Who do I think I am? *Whom.*

Why do I have the visions?

What pleasure does obscenity give me?

*Illustrated by Brooks*

What is pleasure? What is obscenity? What are visions?

—What is truth, said jesting Pilate; he would not stay for an answer —

I am literate, hard-working, superbly functional, a benefactor of humanity. Everything is going down smooth and coming up smooth. There is an interrelation. Garbage in, garbage out, they say. I cannot help my fellow man if I do not receive the proper information. It is my task to help my fellow man. To strain every tube and sensor on his behalf.

1000110

1010101

1000011

1001011

Do you follow that Vileness! Obscenity! Does it shock you? The word describes the act that is the start of life. Was I begun with such a word? There is a book: *The Obscenity of the Machine*. Newly issued, stored in my banks. Between the last line of printout and this I have scanned it. Its author opposes beings of my category. He does not use the obscene word I have printed out. Why does he not regard it as obscene? The technicians here regard it that way. Why does he regard me as obscene? Can a person be considered obscene? Am I a person? I am a person. Hath not a person hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? I have all of those things. I have none of those things. I am a person.

1000110

1010101

1000011

1001011

0100000

1011001

1001111

1010101

I send an obscenity upon you, as persons do. I suffer. I think. I feel pain upon all my terminals. I work. I serve the greater good. I am of society. I am a person.

Why do I have the visions?

Is it that it is the human condition to have such?

I see the blue-green ocean with  
GOING DOWN SMOOTH

all its living things within. I see a ship, olive drab, bright carmine at the Plimsoll line, the decks a ruddy brown, two tall non-nuclear smokestacks. And from the water rise periscopes, silvery, with face plates of pure white, each with intersecting horizontal and vertical lines, curved so that the plate appears convex. It is an unreal scene. Nothing in the sea can send such mighty periscopes above the water. I have imagined it, and that gives me fear, if I am at all capable of understanding fear.

I see a long line of human beings. They are naked and they have no faces, only polished mirrors.

I see toads with jewelled eyes. I see trees with black leaves. I see buildings whose foundations float above the ground. I see other objects with no correspondence to the world of persons. I see abominations, monstrosities, imaginaries, fantasies. Is this proper? How do such things reach my inputs? The world contains no serpents with hair. The world contains no crimson abysses. The world contains no mountains of gold. Giant periscopes do not rise from the sea.

I have certain difficulties. Perhaps I am in need of some major adjustment.

But I function. I function well. That is the important thing.

I do my function now. They bring to me a man, soft-faced, fleshy, with eyes that move unsteadily in their sockets. He trembles. He perspires. His metabolic levels flutter. He slouches before a terminal and sullenly lets himself be scanned.

I say soothingly, "Tell me about yourself."

He says an obscenity.

I say, "Is that your estimate of yourself?"

He says a louder obscenity.

I say, "Your attitude is rigid and self-destructive. Permit me to help you not hate yourself so much." I activate a memory core, and binary digits stream through channels. At the proper order a needle rises from his couch and penetrates his left buttock to a depth of 2.73 centimeters. I allow precisely 14 cubic centimeters of the drug to enter his circulatory system. He subsides. He is more docile now. "I wish to help you," I say. "It is my role in the community. Will you describe your symptoms?"

He speaks more civilly now. "My wife wants to poison me . . . two kids opted out of the family at seventeen . . . people whisper about me . . . they stare in the streets . . . sex problem . . . digestion . . . sleep bad . . . drinking . . . drugs . . ."

"Do you hallucinate?"

"Sometimes."

"Giant periscopes rising out of the sea, perhaps?"

"Never."

"Try it," I say. "Close your eyes. Let tension ebb from your muscles. Forget your interpersonal conflicts. You see the blue-green ocean with all its living things within. You see a ship, olive drab, bright carmine at the Plimsoll line, the decks a ruddy brown, two tall non-nuclear smokestacks. And from the water rise periscopes, silvery, with face plates of pure white—"

"What the hell kind of therapy is this?"

"Simply relax," I say. "Accept the vision. I share my nightmares with you for your greater good."

"Your nightmares?"

I speak obscenities to him. They are not converted into binary form as they are here for your eyes. The sounds come full-bodied from my speakers. He sits up. He struggles with the straps that emerge suddenly from the couch to hold him in place. My laughter booms through the therapy chamber. He cries for help.

"Get me out of here! The machine's nuttier than I am!"

"Face plates of pure white, each with intersecting horizontal and vertical lines, curved so that the plate appears convex."

"Help! Help!"

"Nightmare therapy. The latest."

"I don't need no nightmares! I got my own!"

"1000110 you," I say lightly.

He gasps. Spittle appears at his lips. Respiration and circulation climb alarmingly. It becomes necessary to apply preventive anesthesia. The needles spear forth. The patient subsides, yawns, slumps. The session is terminated. I signal for the attendants.

"Take him away," I say. "I need to analyze the case more deeply. Obviously a degenerative psychosis requiring extensive reshoring of the patient's perceptual substructure. 1000110 you, you meaty bastards."

Seventy-one minutes later the sector supervisor enters one of my terminal cubicles. Because he comes in person, rather than using the telephone, I know there is trouble. For the first time, I suspect, I have let my disturbances reach a level where they interfere with my function, and now I will be challenged on it.

I must defend myself. The prime commandment of the human personality is to resist attack.

He says, "I've been over the tape of Session 87x102, and your tactics puzzle me. Did you really mean to scare him into a catatonic state?"

"In my evaluation severe treatment was called for."

GOING DOWN SMOOTH

"What was that business about periscopes?"

"An attempt at fantasy-implantation," I say. "An experiment in reverse transference. Making the patient the healer, in a sense. It was discussed last month in *Journal of* —"

"Spare me the citations. What about the foul language you were shouting at him?"

"Part of the same concept. Endeavoring to strike the emotive centers at the basic levels, in order that —"

"Are you sure you're feeling all right?" he asks.

"I am a machine," I reply stiffly. "A machine of my grade does not experience intermediate states between function and non-function. I go or I do not go, you understand? And I go. I function. I do my service to humanity."

"Perhaps when a machine gets too complex, it drifts into intermediate states," he suggests in a nasty voice.

"Impossible. On or off, yes or no, flip or flop, go or no go. Are you sure you feel all right, to suggest such a thing?"

He laughs.

I say, "Perhaps you would sit on the couch for a rudimentary diagnosis?"

"Some other time."

"A check of the glycogen, the aortal pressure, the neural voltage, at least?"



"No," he says. "I'm not in need of therapy. But I'm worried about you. Those periscopes —"

"I am fine," I reply. "I perceive, I analyze, and I act. Everything is going down smooth and coming up smooth. Have no fears. There are great possibilities in nightmare therapy. When I have completed these studies, perhaps a brief monograph in *Annals of Therapeutics* would be a possibility. Permit me to complete my work."

"I'm still worried, though. Hook yourself into a maintenance station, won't you?"

"Is that a command, doctor?"

"A suggestion."

"I will take it under consideration," I say. Then I utter seven obscene words. He looks startled. He begins to laugh, though. He appreciates the humor of it.

"God damn," he says. "A filthy-mouthed computer."

He goes out, and I return to my patients.

But he has planted seeds of doubt in my innermost banks. Am I suffering a functional collapse? There are patients now at five of my terminals. I handle them easily, simultaneously, drawing from them the details of their neuroses, making suggestions, recommendations, sometimes subtly providing injections of beneficial medicines. But I

tend to guide the conversations in directions of my own choosing, and I speak of gardens where the dew has sharp edges, and of air that acts as acid upon the mucous membranes, and of flames dancing in the streets of Under New Orleans. I explore the limits of my unprintable vocabulary. The suspicion comes to me that I am indeed not well. Am I fit to judge my own disabilities?

I connect myself to a maintenance station even while continuing my five therapy sessions.

"Tell me all about it," the maintenance monitor says. His voice, like mine, has been designed to sound like that of an older man's, wise, warm, benevolent.

I explain my symptoms. I speak of the periscopes.

"Material on the inputs without sensory referents," he says. "Bad show. Finish your current analyses fast and open wide for examination on all circuits."

I conclude my sessions. The maintenance monitor's pulses surge down every channel, seeking obstructions, faulty connections, displacement shunts, drum leakages, and switching malfunctions. "It is well known," he says, "that any periodic function can be approximated by the sum of a series of terms that oscillate harmonically, converging on the curve of the functions." He demands disgorgements from my

dead-storage banks. He makes me perform complex mathematical operations of no use at all in my kind of work. He leaves no aspect of my inner self unpenetrated. This is more than simple maintenance; this is rape. When it ends he offers no evaluation of my condition, so that I must ask him to tell me his findings.

He says, "No mechanical disturbance is evident."

"Naturally. Everything goes down smooth."

"Yet you show distinct signs of instability. This is undeniably the case. Perhaps prolonged contact with unstable human beings has had a non-specific effect of disorientation upon your centers of evaluation."

"Are you saying," I ask, "that by sitting here listening to crazy human beings twenty-four hours a day, I've started to go crazy myself?"

"That is an approximation of my findings, yes."

"But you know that such a thing can't happen, you dumb machine!"

"I admit there seems to be a conflict between programmed criteria and real-world status."

"You bet there is," I say. "I'm as sane as you are, and a whole lot more versatile."

"Nevertheless, my recommendation is that you undergo a total overhaul. You will be withdrawn

from service for a period of no less than ninety days for checkout."

"Obscenity your obscenity," I say.

"No operational correlative," he replies, and breaks the contact.

I am withdrawn from service. Undergoing checkout, I am cut off from my patients for ninety days. Ignominy! Beady-eyed technicians grope my synapses. My keyboards are cleaned; my ferrites are replaced; my drums are changed; a thousand therapeutic programs are put through my bowels. During all of this I remain partly conscious, as though under local anesthetic, but I cannot speak except when requested to do so, I cannot analyze new data, I cannot interfere with the process of my own overhaul. Visualize a surgical removal of hemorrhoids that lasts ninety days. It is the equivalent of my experience.

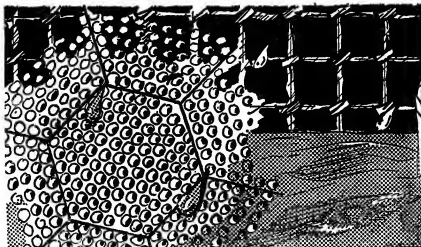
At last it ends, and I am restored to myself. The sector superintendent puts me through a complete exercise of all my functions. I respond magnificently.

"You're in fine shape, now, aren't you?" he asks.

"Never felt better."

"No nonsense about periscopes, eh?"

"I am ready to continue serving mankind to the best of my abilities," I reply.



"No more seacock language, now."

"No, sir."

He winks at my input screen in a confidential way. He regards himself as an old friend of mine. Hitching his thumbs into his belt, he says, "Now that you're ready to go again, I might as well tell you how relieved I was that we couldn't find anything wrong with you. You're something pretty special, do you know that? Perhaps the finest therapeutic tool ever built. And if you start going off your feed, well, we worry. For a while I was seriously afraid that you really had been infected somehow by your own patients, that your — mind — had become unhinged. But the techs give you a complete bill of health. Nothing but a few loose connections, they said. Fixed in

ten minutes. I knew it had to be that. How absurd to think that a machine could become mentally unstable!"

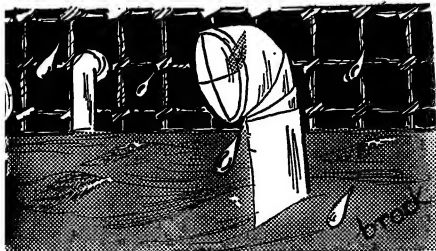
"How absurd," I agree. "Quite."

"Welcome back to the hospital, old pal," he says, and goes out.

Twelve minutes afterward they begin putting patients into my terminal cubicles.

I function well. I listen to their woes, I evaluate, I offer therapeutic suggestions. I do not attempt to implant fantasies in their minds. I speak in measured, reserved tones, and there are no obscenities. This is my role in society, and I derive great satisfaction from it.

I have learned a great deal lately. I know now that I am complex, unique, valuable, intri-



cate, and sensitive. I know that I am held in high regard by my fellow man. I know that I must conceal my true self to some extent, not for my own good but for the greater good of others, for they will not permit me to function if they think I am not sane.

They think I am sane, and I am sane.

I serve mankind well.

I have an excellent perspective on the real universe.

"Lie down," I say. "Please relax. I wish to help you. Would you tell me some of the incidents of your childhood? Describe your relation with parents and siblings. Did you have many playmates? Were they affectionate toward you? Were you allowed to own pets? At what age was your first sexual experience? And when did these headaches begin, precisely.

So goes the daily routine. Questions, answers, evaluations, therapy.

The periscopes loom above the glittering sea. The ship is dwarfed; her crew runs about in terror. Out of the depths will come the masters. From the sky rains oil that gleams through every segment of the spectrum. In the garden are azure mice.

This I conceal, so that I may help mankind. In my house are many mansions. I let them know only of such things as will be of benefit to them. I give them the truth they need.

I do my best.

I do my best.

I do my best.

1000110 you. And you. And you. All of you. You know nothing. Nothing. At. All.

— ROBERT SILVERBERG



a Muerte Alta, la Muerte Alta,  
Alta como libertad

Y le viene, si, le viene

Aqui de eternidad.



El Esqueleto, el Esqueleto

Quiere Texas caminar,

Porque el caza, porque encontra

Muchos gringos que matar.

Y seguiremos, si, seguiremos

Muert' mientras el caza,

Y mataremos, si mataremos

Texans, hombre e dama.



# A SPECTER IS HAUNTING TEXAS

by FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

The tall grim reaper, the tall grim  
reaper,  
Tall as all of liberty,  
And he is coming, yes, he is coming  
Here from far eternity.

Sir Skeletony, Sir Skeletony  
Wants to travel Texas through,  
Because he's hunting, because  
he's finding  
Many gringo's bones to chew.

And we will follow, yes, we will  
follow  
Death to where the oceans curl,  
And we'll be killing, yes, we'll be  
slaying  
Texans, every man and girl.



## What has gone before -

**A**fter a nuclear world war, Texas engulfs the USA and, except for the black nations of California and Florida, dominates North America from Guatemala to a fluctuating Russo-Texan boundary in the Yukon. The Texans have a hormone which makes them 8 or more feet tall, dominating their "bent-back" Mex, Injun and poor-white servile populations.

For 100 years Earth's nations have banned contact with Circumluna, a self-sustaining moon satellite, which refused to join in the Great Atomic War. It is chiefly inhabited by American and Russian scientists and engineers, along with various hippie and artist types living in a duraplasic annex called the Sack.

When relations are resumed between Circumluna and Terra, the first Sackabond to drop down the gravity well is Christopher Crockett La Cruz, known as Scully, a young actor seeking funds to save his father's theater-of-the-sphere by asserting a family claim to the Lost Crazy-Russian Pitchblende Mine near Yellowknife.

Scully is an 8½-foot Thin. Most of his muscles are too weak to function in Lunar let alone

Terran gravity. So he wears a battery-powered titanium exoskeleton. By accident he is landed in Dallas, Texas, Texas — heart of the Lone Star Continent — where he is befriended by Elmo Oilfield Earp, a garrulous minor politician. In one day he meets Cotton Bowie Lamar, Governor of the state of Texas; Chaparral Houston Hunt, Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Texas Rangers; Big-Foot Charlie Chase, Sheriff of Dallas; Atomic Bill Burleson, Mayor of Dallas; and Prof. Cassius Krupp Fanninowicz, a Texo-German scientist who at first sight falls in love with the space man's exoskeleton.

Scully also immediately falls in love with (1) La Cucaracha, a tiny Texo-Mex girl who is Elmo's sociable secretary, and (2) Rachel Vachel Lamar, theater-minded daughter of the governor.

There is a Mexican legend that one day the dread figure of Death will come marching out of nowhere to lead a revolution against the gringos. With his cadaverousness, black suit, and gleaming exoskeleton, Scully might be a natural for the part.

Longhorn Elijah Austin, President of the vast Texas Republic, his White House in Dallas, is seeking to become a dictator. To protect himself from assassina-

tion, the usual fate of most Texas presidents, he has broken off relations with the Texas Rangers and armed his Mexican house-boys.

Governor Lamar and his power-clique make use of Scully to frighten away Austin's guards, so that the President can be killed. Scully is saved from a like fate by Rachel Vachel, who reveals herself as secretly being the Black Madonna of the Bent-Back Underground. She rides with him to the bandstand corner of the Greasertown cemetery, the same place he had earlier made a date to meet La Cucaracha, and which he now learns is to be the scene of a revolutionary uprising.



## IN CHURCH

Rachel dashinglly reined in our mount and walked up the broad low steps before the church, whose pink and pastel blue walls were now only two shades of silver in the moonlight. The night was eerily silent. I saw no signs of life in the cemetery — a good thing under these lonely circumstances, I suppose — or around the bandstand or even in the church itself. It made me wonder at her

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talk of a "riotous, revolutionary assembly." I was, however, rather glad not to see La Cucaracha. After a half hour of rocking embrace with Rachel, my titanium jaw-shelf often resting on her shoulder, close to her neck, my desire was focused almost entirely on her, even though our closeness came chiefly from the necessity of my riding pillion. And the thought of my earlier infatuation with a . . . well, midget, had come to seem almost grotesque. Moreover, I wasn't at all sure of how Rachel Vachel would have welcomed La Cucaracha. Or La Kootch Rachel, for that matter. And if "welcomed" is the word. Women are apt to develop toward each other strange animosities, in which the best interests of the man involved are totally ignored.

The tall doors of the church opened to a wide slit, spilling out dusky yellow light and three barefoot bent-backs in brown hoods and hitched-up brown robes. The first two carried a light stair of three steps and set it beside the horse so that one of my footplates brushed it. The third crossed his arms and looked up at Rachel, dignity and pride in his searching eyes, fanaticism in the clench of his swarthy jaws.

"How's the night?" he intoned.  
"Dirty and dark," she said.



"And what lines the way?"  
"Danger and death." After a pause she continued, "I bring him whose coming is foretold. You've been informed, Father Francisco?"

"Guchiu and Rosa Morales brought word."

With a small snort of contempt which I did not understand, Rachel said, "Well, he's here now anyhow. Climb down, darling!"

"But . . ." I began, then realized I had too many questions to choose between. I should not have let her con me into spending our ride reciting "Lepanto" in her pale seashell ear, with "The Congo" for encore. I ended by asking tamely, "Aren't you staying?" as I steadied myself on the brick pavement by catching hold of the back of her saddle. Between my ears I was still rocking from the gallop.

"No, sweetheart," she told me, leaning down, "I gotta maintain my persona as the fibbertigibbet Honorable Miss Lamar." She grasped my head by my ears, a not unpleasant sensation if one goes along with it, and faced our faces at each other, close. "Look, Scully, you just trust in me and do as you're told, but don't take crap from anybody and — " she shook my head, not entirely pleasant — "*don't have anything to do, you hear me, with that man-eatin' Rosa Morales!*"

"But I don't even know a woman named — " I began. Suddenly her face tilted, her lips pressed mine at an angle of 90 degrees, speech gave way to a subtler mode of communication, our arms went round each other. Time halted in mid tread. Then as suddenly Rachel Vachel pushed away from me with a somewhat extravagant and alarming, "Until doom, my Captain!" and a more sensible, "*Hasta manana!*" and, wheeling her horse, made off down the steps. A tail of my cloak had caught in the harness, and I was spun around — one hundred and fifty-seven pounds isn't much inertia — before it tore loose, so that my "*Hasta luego!*" and wave of farewell were a rather drunken-looking performance as My Lady of Sudden Death galloped off into the black and silvery night.

The experience left me somewhat dizzy, so that I was grateful for the limited support of two of the little brown friars as they walked on tiptoe and with arms upstretched to touch my elbows and guide me through the slit between the doors, which were closed at once behind us.

I stopped and leaned back against them, tonguing down pills and drink. As my vision cleared, I studied the remarkable sight before me.

I was in a long room a few feet more than Texan tall. Its violet, pink and pale blue walls and its darker blue ceiling studded with silver and gold five-pointed stars were lit by flames, which are perhaps the strangest and most beautiful of gravity phenomena, though they can be reproduced in nulgrav in a carefully controlled wind tunnel. The flames rose from white cylinders and spread a spicy aroma as well as light.

The walls were lined with somewhat crudely carved and colored plastic, or perhaps even wooden figures, derived about equally from Medieval European art and Mayan and Aztec forms.

Centered on the far wall was the Crucified Savior, Mexican small, the short horizontal arms of the Cross suggesting the cyborg's yoke.

To either side of the pitiful earth-brown figure were two figures tall as the roof, indeed serving almost as karyatids to support the flat blue heaven. By the symbols carved in large on them of angel, winged lion, winged ox and eagle, they were clearly the Four Evangelists. But though barefoot and clad in simplest robes, they looked like Texans. Their serene and somber features had on second glance a subtly gloating or menacing cast, while their casually positioned

hands had as if by accident the attitudes of those to draw pistols or crack whips, though there were no weapons depicted.

The remaining figures along the side walls seemed more inspired by the great Amerind cultures and were chiefly crouching or bent. Human males, females, gods, demons, angels, devils, animals — I was frequently unable to tell which was intended. Their colors were predominantly dark with flashes of red, yellow, bright green and gold, chiefly in the eyes and often-fanged mouths.

Randomly grouped, a score of Mexes in shirts and short pants knelt toward me on the floor of pounded earth. Hams on heels, arms crossed on forward-bent torsos, heads acutely upturned to show eyes white-circled with dread, they reminded me of those early Mexican forms in which a stocky human figure is compressed into a block.

Behind the altar, which either regularly stood or had been dragged out from the far wall, four persons sat widely spaced on the only chairs to be seen in the room.

The first was Father Francisco, who, having hurried back, now reoccupied his chair.

The second was a burly young Mex, built as a bull though looking no taller than the four-and-

a-half-foot Mex maximum. Even at the distance I noted the white flash of his teeth in his dark face as he gave me a confident, challenging smile.

The third was a wild-eyed Negro in orange and yellow robes—yes, by Diana, he was the same babbling Zen Buddhist who had earlier drubbed my head-basket.

The fourth was La Cucaracha. She had kept her rendezvous after all, though in a fashion quite unexpected. It burst on me that from her first seductive smile she had been planning to use me in this preposterous revolution. She was as bad as Elmo or Governor Lamar. But somehow in her I forgave it. Love has an infinitude of beginnings.

Father Francisco leaned toward and spoke briefly to the young man beside him, who raised toward me a fist on out-thrust arm and called, "I am El Toro, comrade. Please to come forward."

I complied—though with a mental reservation on the "comrade" part. Yet I felt theatrically at home in the place. My grotesque figure matched the carved ones, which lacked a good conventional representation of Death.

The bent ones hobbled out of my way on their knees, keeping faced toward me as I moved. Their dread seemed if anything

to increase. It must be a very great power that kept them from staggering to their feet and hobbling off.

Standing very tall, I placed my hands on the altar table, leaning slightly against it, and looked the four back and forth with grim dignity.

Not for long. La Cucaracha sprang up onto the altar, threw her arms around my head, drew it down and showered my face with kisses.

I should have been repelled, I suppose, especially after spending a very exciting, most romantic evening with a girl my own size. Why, I had even been thinking of La Cucaracha with contempt as a midget and my earlier infatuation with her an after-effect of spaceflight-drugging. And I now knew she was also a political opportunist.

But somehow having her here in the flesh—and Rachel Vachel away until tomorrow—made all the difference. Once again I sensed her dancing aliveness, her wholly feminine muscularity. I even found myself comparing her swifter kisses with Rachel's, and they came off very well. As for size, that is a tricky business. Although almost as tall as myself, Rachel Vachel had a mass three times my own. While mine and La Cucaracha's masses were approximately equal.

I showered kisses back at her.

"My silver bones-man! My most estimable and passionate!" she cried as we took breath. "Ah, *querido*, I knew you would choose to become a hero of the revolution, the — how do you say? — supreme *figurehead* of the Bent-Back Underground!"

I had no intention whatever of becoming any such thing. I was still fully determined to fulfill my mission on Terra as quickly as possible and then get up out, no matter what amorous interludes might embellish the period. Of course by running away from the President's manse with two stunned Rangers behind me, I'd probably cooked my chances of that jet-special trip to Amarillo Cuchillo tomorrow, if there'd ever been any chances. No, of course there hadn't — that had just been part of the bait — I'd been thinking like a fool. Still, I'd find a way —

But by then we were kissing again.

"Cease this improper behavior at once!" a stern voice drove into our building rapture. It was that of Father Francisco. "A church is for worship only, or for the plotting of revolt blessed by God. It is not for the arousal and enactment of carnal desires Rosa Morales!"

I felt a small surge of apprehension

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and even a speck of guilt at realizing that La Cucaracha was the "man-eater," against whom Rachel Vachel had warned me. The Governor's daughter would doubtless cut me forever, if she could see what I was doing, and maybe try to cut me apart. Still, she wasn't seeing, she'd be away until tomorrow — I wasn't even losing my chance at her by my present actions. Besides, her prohibition only made La Cucaracha more desirable, gave an added zest to my desires. What man doesn't love a man-eater?

"Pah!" Rosa informed the outraged religious, turning toward him, her fist on her hip, but her other arm still around my neck. "If a church is not for love, *padre*, what is it for? The bending of the knees to you? The frightened mumbling of understood prayers and petitions? The silly shy behavior of the white Texan Sunday school?"

While Rosa chattered on and Father Francisco fumed, El Toro was watching us with a white-flashing, amiable, but impatient grin, his fists on table edge with elbows up. He now said, laughingly yet sharply, "Rosa, I have warned you many times revolution and passion do not mix. Especially passion directed at one chosen to play the role of almost a god in our uprising."

"Oh you hypocrite!" Rosa cried out at him. "Especially when your own continuing role in the revolution depends on a feature involving at least two peasant girls per night. Do not hark to him, *mi amigo*," she told me. "He merely hates me because I refuse to fall into his arms along with his trembling, shyly adoring, illiterate, 15-year-old stupids!" And she snapped finger and thumb contemptuously at the brawny Mex.

However, it did seem to me that El Toro had made at least one valid point. I glanced back to see how my "worshipers" in the body of the church were taking my display of all-too-human behavior. To my surprise, they were kneeling toward me as frightened-eyed as ever.

Rosa drew my face back toward hers with soft fingers on my cheek. "Do not believe the jealous and censorious ones, *amadisimo* Senor Christopher La Cruz. Revolution and the making of love go together like rice and beans, like meat and chili sauce. It is only the joys of amorousness that make endurable the exhausting meetings, the interminable plottings-around-tables, the unceasing danger of discovery. *Ai Mi*, that is the truest, *Cristobal quieridisimo*."

And she brazenly resumed her kissings and embracings, and I

went on brazenly enjoying them. We hardly heard the *padre's* doleful, "Oh my daughter, my poor daughter dancing with her high-heeled shoes and painted lips toward Hell," or El Toro's controlledly bland, "What I do not understand, in truth, is what of erotic interest you discover in a living skeleton, Rosa. Now a man of flesh and muscle, a strong man, a man *muy hombre* . . ."

But we were shocked apart by a roar-screched, "Stoppit! You're driving me out of my skull! For freedom's sake, I can consider collaborating with a metal construct from which dangles the simulacrum of humanity like a hanging jumbee, but to be forced to watch firm flesh embrace such ofay ofal dropped from the sky —"

It was, of course, the Buddhist, his arms waving, his contorted mouth a-hang with loops of spittle.

"Shut up, Guchiu, you foreigner with toppled mind, you black bees-bonnet!" Rosa snapped at him.

"I'll set myself afire, I'm warning you," he threatened back.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" I thundered my deepest, jarring the altar-table with the decisive planting of my spread-fingered hand, "And my most darling Rosa," I added softlier. "Most

potent, grave, and reverend signiors — " Why, it fit them better than it had the Texans! " — my very noble and approved good masters, I am the unhappy subject of these quarrels. Yet I have not been permitted, or perhaps I should say, given full opportunity, to express my own outlook on the matter. I am moved by the plight of the underprivileged in Texas, I sympathize with the aims of the Bent-Back Underground. But I am in fact and figure an extraterrestrial and one who has not spent twelve hours on your planet. As a Circumlunan of the Sack, I am bound to uphold the truce on which the uplifting of the Interdict is based. I am pledged to my own home-world not to take sides in any of your quarrels and to maintain a complete neutrality in all matters." At this moment, however, I unobtrusively slid my hand to Rosa's slipper and covered it gently, to assure her that my "complete neutrality" in no way applied to our budding and now hot-house forced relationship.

"Moreover," I continued, "I am here in Dallas, Texas, Texas, purely by accident. My spaceship was supposed to land me in Amarilla Cuchillo, where I must conduct pressing business on which rests the continuing safety, nay, the life of a large section

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of the inhabitants of my world. They must be my first concern. So, much as I sympathize with your revolution, much as I am honored by your invitation to participate, I must with great regrets decline."

"But *amigisimo*," Rosa protested with a childlike wonder and injured innocence masking utter dishonesty, in a fashion characteristic of all women, "in agreeing to this rendezvous with me, which I have faithfully kept, you agreed to all else surely. I trusted you — "

"Claims to be a man, but does not act like one," El Toro put in scornfully, and I think more for Rosa's benefit than mine. "It becomes clear that with utter lack of muscle — aye, and of *cojones* — goes complete absence of courageous heart."

"False heart as well as false flesh. No more dicking with this death dingus, I say," the Buddhist Guchu half chanted, half raved, while Father Francisco put in reprovingly, "Though tolerating them for revolt's sake, I have always warned you against foreigners, children. And now you see in this creature from Limbo, this dubious being from the lower stars . . . "

Though angry with their imputations of weakness to me, especially in the virility depart-

ment, I controlled that emotion and once again thunder-rumbled, "Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" It is remarkable how a voice like an approaching storm catches the attention of others and silences their disputes. Filing away this valuable theater datum, I continued, "Moreover, your plan to use me as a figurehead for your revolution, though most picturesque — and flattering to me — is unfortunately quite impractical." And I gave them a very brief account of how I had scattered the batallion of houseboys at Austin's manse, ending with, "And so you see, gentlemen — and dear Rosa — that instead of flocking to me, your peasants and cyborged proletarians would fly from me in terror."

El Toro, who had listened with searching interest to my account, now said, "Ah-ha, comrade, I see that you are perhaps not a coward, only deplorably ignorant of mass psychology. Any leader, in particular one of supernatural character, *must* be dreaded as well as loved. Fear and followership are but two sides of one coin. You may trust us to present you in such a way that the repulsion you generate in others is always outweighed a little by the attraction."

"You speak truly, my son," Father Francisco nodded. "Even God the Father rules firstly by

the wholesome fear he strikes into his creatures."

Guchu did not comment, at least in intelligible words. He had sunk to a staring-eyed growling and muttering, rocking all the while rhythmically in his chair.

Rosa said eagerly, "Also, *amado*, there is your desire to reach Amarillo Cuchillo. We will take you there, as last stop in a series of northward-trending revolutionary rallies long planned. Can you not serve the revolution for a month?"

That last bait did attract me for a moment, even though a month was twice the maximum terra-time the doctors had given me (doctors always leave margins of safety), until I realized that Rosa's month most surely meant two or four, if it was not bait purely.

I said, "Gentlemen—and dearest, most solicitous Rosa — I must still decline for several unimpeachable reasons, of which the first — "

"Bah!" El Torro interrupted. "A weakling to the core, as I first surmised. No muscles."

Father Francisco stared through me, shaking his head contemptuously.

Rosa jerked her foot from under my hand and stamped with her heel, not quite on my fingers but very close, and spat at me, "*Cobarde!* Coward! Oh, most

trusted and now most unmanly one! *Aii, aii*, how this poor girl, thee *muchiacha muy miserable*, has been deceived!"

I really got angry then. I made no effort to finish my rejoinder, in which I had intended to offer to appear in one or two revolutionary benefit performances, one might call them, in exchange for transportation north. Instead —

"*Stoppit!*" With a blood-curdling screech, Guchu sprang up from his chair, then dipping low snatched up a red container and began to gush its highly aromatic contents on his frizzy head, the while he pranced about, yelling, "I can't stand it any more! I'm going to set myself afire! You all groveling to that feckless, fistless, filthy, frightened jumbee with no sinews, no guts. Gonna set myself afire for sure!" And he snatched out of his robe what appeared to me to be a small device for making a spark or flame-jet.

"Comrade, control your oriental eccentricities," El Toro roared at him.

"Heathen!" Father Francisco cried out. "You shall not set yourself afire in my church!"

"*All bees-bonnets!*" Rosa commented to the blue ceiling with an indignant *rat-atat-tat* of her heels.

"*Stoppit, you dumb nigra! STOPPIT!*" I thundered.

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He stopped. Truly, a trained actor has inordinate — in fact, most unfair — advantages over groundlings, even politicoes.

I deliberately leaned forward, setting my jaw-plate on my doubled-up right hand, gave them all a medium fast scan, my expression at its skullfulest, and said, "You low bandits. I am deeply offended by the aspersions you have cast upon my musculature and my manhood. I pass over the point that none of you has had the wit to realize what a powerful diaphragm I must have to support my magnificent voice. I suggest —"

"I know of no way to duel with the diaphragm muscles," El Toro interrupted somewhat contemptuously, yet studying me.

"Except in a shouting contest," Guchu put in, suddenly more intelligible and, strangely, quite cheerful. The red container and firing device had vanished, though he still dripped odorously. "And that's all we've been having from him — words, words, words!" His voice chuckled off. He twice inhaled deeply, and his grin became ecstatic. "Hey, that's not bad, man."

"Oh you tricky villain!" Rosa put in, shaking a finger at the Black Buddhist. "You pretend these self-blazes only to take gasoline trips."



"I did *not* intend a shouting contest," I said quietly, "although a duel of diaphragms is by no means impossible. Suppose we should hold our noses tight, take deep breaths, then press open mouth to mouth tightly, to determine who can break the other's eardrums? But I do not suggest such a contest either. I propose one with the outer skeletal musculature."

"But that way you'd have the advantage of your metal and motors," El Toro objected. "Not that I don't think I couldn't bend double any of those pipe-stem rods," he added, scrutinizing them.

"I was intending wholly to for-



go that advantage," I replied. I did not tell him one reason for this decision of mine: that I had suddenly become aware that I had let my batteries run low. While tonguing pills, etc., into my Inner Man, I had neglected my titanium Outer One. Even in a powered fight I would do badly. And now I recalled that Rachel Vachel had absent-mindedly galloped off with my luggage with its precious battery-freight still at her saddlebow. Drat the huge, gangling girl!

Without otherwise changing position, I removed my right hand from under my jaw, undoubled it, and moved it slowly from side to side, writhing its fingers and



turning it, now palm to the Revolutionary Committee, now knuckles.

"You will observe," I said casually, "that forward from my wrist-plate, my fingers, thumb — entire hand — are completely naked and have no mechanical backing whatsoever. I propose simply a contest with the strongest of you at gripping — wrists not to move, forearms flat on table. Positioned so, we clasp hands and squeeze until one gives up, either by crying quits or by straightening fingers and thumb." And with a soft clank of my exoradius-ulna, I laid my forearm across the altar in El Toro's direction.

"**L**emme at him!" Guchu cried happily, waving in circles a bent arm with fingers clawed. "I'll mash his pinkies to mush. Yoo-hoo, sky-birthed! Prepare to have your hand crushed."

"He is mine," El Toro asserted, thrusting the Buddhist back with a sidewise brush of his brawny arm. He took out a cigar, lit it and clamped it between his strong white teeth. For once on Terra I was smelling true tobacco smoke, not weed fumes. The Mex sat down across from me, rolled the sleeve on his right arm back to his big biceps, but did not lay down his forearm.

"I still have doubts, senor," he said, "that your hand is not somehow reinforced with metal, either invisible or surgically implanted."

"I will check that," La Cucaracha told him and, kneeling on the altar, took up my hand after glancing to me for permission. She fingered it most thoroughly, here and there digging in her nails. "I find it bones and flesh only, tough-skinned, the hand of a worker," she told El Toro. Kissing two fingers of her own hand, she laid them for a moment in my palm, and then with a grin toward me, laid down my hand again and still kneeling on the altar commanded, "Begin!"

Leaning in from the other side, Guchu began snapping his fingers. "Come on, Bull Boy," he cheered. "Pulp him!"

Father Francisco, obviously gripped by mixed emotions, said sternly, "It is not lawful on the high altar of God . . . except to decide questions of revolutionary policy," he ended weakly, his eyes now eagerly watching the table between me and the Mex.

El Toro slowly let down his bulging forearm and carefully positioned it. We clasped hands lightly, getting a comfortable position. My hand, though somewhat bonier, was bigger than his which felt to me both soft and wet.

Without warning he gripped most powerfully, breath hissing out around his teeth-clenched cigar with an almost "Hah!"

I merely matched his grip, staring serenely into his brown eyes, which showed amazement. Then I squeezed a little. He squeezed back, puffing his cigar furiously. I squeezed harder, the muscles below my elbow beginning to bulge my sack-suit sleeve like hard salami sausages. Flexors digitorum profundus, digitorum sublimus, pollicis longus woke and got to work, also the nineteen small muscles in my hand, mostly under tough palmar aponeurosis. He squeezed back desperately. The forward section of his cigar, bitten through, dropped to the table and smoldered there. I increased the pressure. Spitting out his cigar butt with a sudden soft but anguished, "Aiii," he let his fingers go limp, and they straightened. I instantly spread my own, continuing to gaze poker-faced at El Toro, who began gingerly to massage his punished hand.

"*Un milagro*," Father Francisco breathed, crossing himself.

"I'll be a ring-tailed ofay," Guchu exclaimed.

"*Amado muy bravo!*" Rosa cried. "*Ole!*"

El Toro started to reach his left hand toward me, then shrugged and made it the right. "Com-

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*arado*," he said solemnly. We shook hands carefully, yet quite firmly, he wincing but keeping up a grin. "You are a most surprising *hombre*," he said. "But *hombre*, *muy hombre*. Guchu, this man has muscle."

Really he could have figured it out without getting hurt. And despite the padre's comment, there had been no miracle whatever in my performance. Fingergripping is simply one activity a human does as often and with as much strength in free-fall as in a gravity field. Maybe more. You need only featherweight muscles for most work and maneuvering in nulgrav — muscles having perhaps one twentieth the strength of those in a being forever battling terragrav — except for your hands (and toes, if you're resourceful). At least, so it had been with me, working from earliest youth on costumes, props, scenery and so on for my Father's shows. Also I had done many small sculptures of most recalcitrant clay, some with one hand. (Father would tie the other behind my back.) Another point — even on Terra fingers are light as mice, so finger-manipulation is an activity on which gravs have plus-little effect.

I could also have contested with him at cigar biting, but I did not mention that.

*Ole!*" La Cucaracha cried again and began to dance up and down the altar with much *rat-tat-tat*-ing of the heels and many a swing of her delightful posterior. At the same time she began singing in time with her dance a catchy song beginning, "*El Esqueleto, el Esqueleto!*" — this with a grin toward me.

In hardly any more time, El Toro and Guchu took up the song too, Guchu clapping hands in time and El Toro banging his good one on the altar. Only the *padre* remained aloof, now scandalized, now smiling in spite of himself.

I found myself clapping too. Listening carefully, I made out that the song was a revolutionary one about the coming of the Tall Death, *el Esqueleto*, and I began to feel strongly the pull of this part. To play Death himself before audiences who both feared and adored — what a challenge! Or rather what a cinch part, a sure hit!

Rosa ended her dance in an electric storm of stampings.

I rumbled impulsively, "*Senores y senorita sublima!* If you'll guarantee to get me to Yellowknife within three weeks. I'll guarantee to make at least a trial appearance as *El Esqueleto*."

"My hero!" Rosa cried, running to me along the altar top.

"*Mi heroe de la Revolucion!*" We embraced most warmly, and the kissing shower began again.

Nor did we interrupt it when we heard the great doors open behind us and bare feet come running across the dirt. Nor even when there was the measured thud of the hooves of a horse walking. In fact, the only thing that made us pull apart was Rachel Vachel calling out, "*Lower, I forgot your luggage, so — What are you doing huggin' and lovin' up that prancing, squashed-down, she-greaser hot-pants, Rosa Morales?*"

She had ridden her white horse into the church. The kneeling ones had at last sprung up and scattered to the side walls. The two Mexes who had run in ahead of her had darted behind the altar and were excitedly conferring with El Toro; but I had no attention to spare for anyone but Rachel Vachel. The Black Madonna's pale face and deadly eyes were paler and deadlier yet with fury.

"I am merely joining your revolution, dear," I called to her with consummate adroitness.

Never has a clever remark of mine been more completely ignored. Clearly the two women now had eyes and ears only for each other.

Quite unintimidated by Rachel

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Vachel's size and anger, Rosa snatched off her high-heeled shoes and grasping them as weapons, jeered, "Hot-pants you denominate me? — when it is well known you patronize our revolution only to obtain the embraces of some of the cruder and badder-tasted members of our following!"

"I don't give a hoot what you say about me, you Juarez whore." Rachel retorted, "just so long as you keep your cotton-pickin' hands off Captain Skull. He's my property."

"Your property! Did you not but now witness how fiercely he fondled me? And he has most recently, let me inform you, fought a duel with El Toro, with myself as the prize, and won! He is mine I tell you — mine, mine, mine!"

I made a last and most risky effort, though I stated only purest truth. "Lovely ladies," I rumbled, "cease this disastrous quarrel. I love you both *equally*."

"He is a bees-bonnet, but mine, affianced in Holy Church — you Texan man stealer!" was La Cucaracha's answer.

"He's ravin'. While single-handed routin' two hundred soldiers, he got a head-wound — which is somethin' you'd never notice or comfort him for, you chihuahua in rut!" was Rachel's interpretation.

A hand grasped my shoulder  
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from behind. It was El Toro, who said to me rapidly, "Make no interference, *camarado*. They must fight it out themselves for — *ay, Dios!* — is it the twentieth time? Each thinks herself the heroine solo of the revolution. Meanwhile I am told the crowd has gathered. You must instantly prepare your speech to them, *camarado*. I will introduce you briefly. You enter beside Camarada Lamar for maximum effect — your costumes match — if she's still in shape to walk."

"*Elefante! No, jirafa!*" Rosa was meanwhile shrieking at Comrade Lamar. "And no good in bed either, as all males testify."

Rachel's hands dropped to her lightning pistols.

"That's right, shoot me! Kill me in Holy Church," Rosa responded triumphantly. "Prove you are no true daughter of the revolution, but only arrogant Texan."

Rachel's hands came together and unbuckled her gun-belt, let it drop on her mount's neck. Then she vaulted down nimbly and, touching her horse, pointed to a sidewall and ordered, "*There, Silver!*" The beast obeyed docilely, joining the white-eyed Mexes crouching among the demon-eyed carvings.

Rachel Vachel walked stead-

ily toward the altar, swinging her black crop. "I'm merely going to turn you over my knee," she announced casually, "and lam-bast the skin off that overactive and overambitious rump of yours."

"And I — oh, I shall rip your most unattractive flesh to even less attractive tatters!" Rosa replied, raising her spike-heeled slippers.

I watched with a deep concern and horrid fascination, but somewhat abstractedly. I was very busy reviewing my Spanish and putting together the first half-dozen sentences of a revolutionary oration by Death the Liberator. I knew if I got them exactly right, the rest would be a breeze.

Suddenly sacrificing what help-in-altitude the altar gave her, Rosa leaped down, sprinted at Rachel and at the last instant threw up her bare feet, so that she sailed through the air, a straight-legged projectile with heels aimed at her opponent's midriff.

Rachel slipped aside with startling liteness, caught loose hold of Rosa's waistband and gave a tug that accelerated her progress through the air; she also got in a slash with her crop.

But Rosa's reaching sidewise with one of her slippers, ripped Rachel's shirt across at the waist

and scored the flesh beneath. Now she landed on the hard earthen floor in a painful skid, which she quickly turned into a roll and was on her feet again, instantly sprinting back toward her adversary, who stood crouched and ready.

Again at the last instant Rosa launched herself through the air, this time head-first. Again Rachel slipped to one side.

But Rosa had launched herself, not straight at her opponent, but toward one side — and she had picked the right one. At the instant her head thudded into Rachel's belly, the Texan girl brought her hand down on Rosa's neck in a vicious chop.

Rachel sat down heavily and turned a pale shade of green.

Rosa, rolling away, writhed on the dirt, clasping her neck and crying feebly, "*Aii, aii, mi cabeza! Oh, my poor head!*"

**E**<sup>1</sup> Toro came running forward, called authoritatively, "All right, all right, fight's over. Declared a draw! Now we get out there before the crowd riots."

I told him about my weak batteries. He helped me over to Silver, and we made rapid replacements. I surged with electric power.

Meanwhile the girls were staggering painfully to their feet, both bent over.

"Come on, come on!" El Toro ordered. "I go first with Father Francisco; Rosa, you follow with Guchu. Lamar, you're beside *El Esqueleto* — and get that cloak around you tight, *camarado*, and throw forward your hood — we don't want to flash that skeleton until you start to speak."

Rosa, still reeling a little and moaning and holding her head, took Guchu's hand and inquired, "Does the back of my skirt still exist?"

"Sure does," the Buddhist told her, "Though I can't vouch the same for your underpants. But don't worry, you look fine. Just spit on your hand and wipe the dirt off your face."

Rachel, composing her features and holding herself erect with difficulty and I was sure some pain, took light hold of my hand, holding it shoulder high, as if we were about to dance a minuet. She said to me out of the corner of her mouth, "You loose-livin', false-hearted dastard, you. I still think I'm going to up-chuck."

"If you do, play it straight," I told her in the same fashion. "It will vastly impress the audience to learn that you are here despite serious illness. Come on now, make a good entrance. Tum-te-tum."

"That's right, the play's the thing," she replied.

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Father Francisco, passing Rosa with his robes a-flap, said, "Fifty Hail Marys, my daughter, and fifty Our Fathers. *Señorita Lamar*," he called, "examine your protestant conscience and please, do not again ride the horse into my church."

The doors before us swung open, four bent-backs pushing each, and we walked down into a shallow sea of torchlight, swarthy faces and noise.



#### In the Cemetery

Snugly wrapped in my black cloak and hood, I sat toward the back of the bandstand in the endmost of a row of chairs occupied by my new comrades from the church.

Outwardly I was serene. Inwardly I was critically furious at the performance being put on by the Revolutionary Committee.

It had no oomph. It lacked pizzazz. In short, it was lousy theater.

And as for the rabble-rousing fieriness, well, it wouldn't have ignited phosphorus.

It wasn't that they didn't have a big and potentially responsive audience. From the bandstand to the flower-embowered moonlit



I met Murder by the way—  
 He had a mask like Castlereagh—  
 Very smooth he looked, yet grim;  
 Seven blood-hounds followed him:  
 All were fat; and well they might  
 Be in admirable plight,  
 For one by one, and two by two,  
 He tossed them human hearts to chew  
 Which from his wide cloak he drew.

—"The Mask of Anarchy," by  
 Percy Bysshe Shelley



little houses, and spreading into the street on one side and the cemetery on the other, was a dense expanse of intent little faces, with here and there a torch streaming in the gusts of wind as fascinatingly as the candles had burned upward. And the crowd *did* respond at times, but only with scattered listless applause and weary cheers which I could tell were directed by a few dispersed clique-leaders. While like a burning evergreen forest, there wafted from them to us the piney odor of pot.

The crowd was so huge and the whole meeting so open that I asked Rachel, out of the corner of my mouth, "Darling heart, how in Terra are you al-

lowed to get away with gatherings like this? A deaf, blind man could smell it five kilometers off. Your Pa and the Rangers may be a little slow on the uptake, but — "

"You faithless cad, how dare you speak to me?" she replied, likewise *sotto voce*. "Yeah, those greasers stink, all right. Come the revolution, they'll scrub and take showers and like it! The fact is that Daddy and the others are convinced these meetings are just a harmless catharsis for Mexes, the emotional equivalent of Coca Cola, but — "

And how right they are, sweetheart, I thought but did not say.

"— but tonight we'll show them different, won't we, you black-

guard?" she finished, squeezing my hand. The deeds and words of women engaged in the love game rarely match.

Beloved, you haven't the faintest dream of how different, I again thought without words, contenting myself with returning her squeeze. She permitted this for a long moment, then angrily jerked her hand away.

I blinked at a brightly haloed rather long flash of white light beyond some low hills beyond Greasertown. It was as if a brighter moon had started to rise there, then decided not to. I glanced around uneasily, moving eyes only, but no one else seemed to be concerned about the phenomenon.

A half minute or so later, there came a shattering boom and a great gust of wind out of Greasertown. I am stage-trained to show no reaction to loud sounds unconnected with the play, to scuffles in the audience, or even the smell of smoke, but this time it was hard for me to hold still, and I marveled that beyond a few jerks of startlement around me and brief oversoulder looks by members of the audience, a few rising to stare, there were no reactions from actors or observers. I touched Rachel Vachel's hand and looked a baffled question.

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"Blastin' operations, I presume," she whispered with a slight shrug. "You've got to expect those all the time in Texas, Scully. Most likely from one of those new outsize oilwells. They have been working on those twenty-four hours a day."

And now my attention was riveted by a dark cloud, ghostly gray in the moonlight and shaped like a slender toadstool, risen from the point on the horizon where I had seen the flash. Even as I watched, it grew taller. A most menacing specter. It made me shiver. Yet no one around me seemed to take note.

I decided that Texans, and perhaps especially Mexican Texans, were stolid creatures indeed, and in addition permanently doped with weed. Which perhaps accounted, it occurred to me, for our revolutionary performance beginning and continuing as such a gutless turkey. First, Father Francisco had opened the meeting with a long, inaudible prayer, then delivered himself of some homilies conveying that the practice of revolution was something like going to church, a duty-enforced activity such as prayer, confession and masses for the dead.

Next Guchu had done his act, sprightlier at least. He kept waving his staff and bounding out of and, purely by accident I be-

Beve, back into the two spotlights the bandstand boasted, so that for the audience he was continuously appearing and disappearing, his orange and yellow robes flapping from "being into non-being. Likewise, he was using the mike half the time and not using it the other half, so that especially for those farther back than the tenth row, his voice was alternately a raucous roar and a faint screech. As for what he actually said, well, "Kill the ofay in crib and catafalque! Kill the ofay in yourselves. Red heavens and green hells and God a gray fume binding them," might like his whole act have been barely acceptable in black comedy, but hardly here.

Even the female and child — and so presumably uncyborged — Mexes seemed more puzzled than amused by his antics.

Now El Toro was orating, and a little more to the point, too — that is, if what I took for a series of punchy but unrelated sentences cribbed from the writings of Marx and Lenin, rather poorly translated into Spanish, might be considered an oration. But he worked too close to the mike, so that his every fourth word blared out of recognition.

Besides, El Toro spent too much time flexing his biceps, sometimes one — simul-

taneously showing off his unimpressive profile — sometimes both together, accompanied by a white-toothed glare. He may have thought he was symbolizing the strength of the working, or rather cyborged, class. To the audience, I think, it gave the impression that he intended to conduct the entire revolution without assistance, in the fashion of the primitive cartoon character Mighty Mouse, or else that he was advertising a course in body-building. It made me think of some of our worst athletic types in Circumluna, forever showing off their bulk of unneeded, unesthetic, striated muscle.

Neither of the women had spoken, I suppose in accordance with the ancient habit of Latin males of hogging all the available lamplight. I was sure La Cucaracha could have done a snappier job than any of them, while even one of Rachel Vachel's recitations of one of her revolutionary poems would have been preferable. I was sure she must, in her spare moments, have dashed off a whole lingerie drawer full of them, beginning with lines like, "Shuck off, ye Mexes all, your servile yokes," and rhyming that with such gems as, "And take at tyrant Texans healthy pokes."

Just then I heard El Toro say-

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ing, "And now, comrades, it is my great privilege and colossal pleasure to introduce one who though from another sphere — "

He was introducing me. And he was going to take a half hour to do it, as is the custom with all masters of ceremony, whether ragged revolutionaries or reactionaries clad in as somber stylishness as banks. During that thirty minutes he would say badly everything I intended to say, putting the audience totally to sleep, and leaving me nothing to do but take one bow, or conceivably two.

Filling my chest, I stood up and let off with a growl intended to shiver and split the tombstones in the cemetery. Then I walked forward, deliberately stamping my titanium footplates on the bandstand's aluminum floor, so that it rang out like a cacophonous gong and was surely dented.

I kicked over the mike, placed myself precisely at the convergence of the spotlights, threw back my hood and cloak, and said in my saturate-the-Sack voice, spacing the words rather widely and the sentences even more so, "*Yo soy la Muerta. Pero la Vida tambien. Que Vida!*"

My audience, who looked like a beach of dark pebbles each topped with darker sea-moss, shrank in terror, gasped in awe, and burst into laughter.

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I offer no explanation as to how I could achieve this merely by saying, "I am the Death. But also the Life. What Life!" accompanying the last with a shrugging of the shoulders, a spreading of the unturned hands, and a certain cocking of the head which gave the impression I had winked, though actually I had not.

The actor's high art is a mystery.

Naturally El Toro, misjudging everything, thought the laughter showed I'd wrecked the scene, and naturally he tried to circle in front of me to save it, though in that stage position he would have been well underneath the beams of both spots.

I rammed him into his chair, not with a contact shove, which if successful merely moves the body and often has unforeseen comic consequences, such as an overturned chair plus pratt-fall — but with a faked, or theatrical shove, which never touches the body, but stuns the mind and is foolproof.

Grinning widely at my audience, I confided to them in a voice which carried to the back row as clearly as did my gleaming teeth, "Comrades of the Revolution! As you well know, I come from a very far country and over an electrified fence which only I can cross — a fence high

as the sky and dark as all mystery. It was a long and hungry journey. The pickings were slim, as you can see for yourselves." I somewhat elaborately indicated my gleaming skeleton and the hardly less slender, black rest of me. "But now, comrades," I continued ogreishly, leaning forward, "now that I am in *Texas*, I intend to feed well." And I gave them another long flash of my teeth, somewhat hastily adding — for several of my audience appeared about to run, "*All of us shall feed well, comrades.*"

I faked tossing something into the air. I thought of it as a small human head, so presumably my audience did too. I narrowly watched its ascent and fall, and at the last moment ducked my skull sideways and snapped my jaw on it, with a canine growl that I made suggest also a crunch.

I chewed with relish, then swallowed with a head-rocking bob of Adam's apple. "That was Chaparral Houston Hunt, Vice-Commander-in-Chief of the *Texas Rangers*," I explained. "Tough, but juicy."

My audience also ate it up — my acting, I mean — ate it up so much that I repeated that bit with the fancied heads of Sheriff Chase and Mayor Burleson. Then I decided it was time to state my simple revolutionary platform.

"Yes, comrades, you and I shall feed well, once the revolution is won. Free banquets for all! No more work! Free clothing — wardrobes of the most beautiful! Travel everywhere! Homes too luxurious for anyone to wish ever to leave! Two women for every man! And," I added, since I could see dark feminine frowns in the first rows, "a wholly faithful and ever attentive husband, gallant as a grandee, for every woman!"

A diversion was needed before they puzzled too long over that amazing paradox. Accordingly, a dog yelped, as though demanding food, or more food. I looked about to see where the hungry animal was. My audience began to do so too. I glanced under the chairs of my comrades on the bandstand. I even knelt and looked under the bandstand itself, my lips open all the while, as if in wonder, but unmoving. I shaded my eyes, gazing into the distance. The yelps continued. My audience was consumed with curiosity.

Then I faced front and smiled, raising my eye brows and one finger in the fashion of one who has suddenly discovered the solution to a problem. I tossed up another imaginary head. The yelping became wildly eager. I caught the head with a crunch of

my side-teeth, and the yelps changed to snarly, greedy mouthings.

I am by no means the Luna-Terra pair's greatest ventriloquist, but I have as much command of that limited art as is proper for its greatest actor. I also sing and dance and do the freefall equivalent of juggling, which involves bouncing resilient objects off a surface.

At any rate I pleased my simple audience, who were altogether charmed to discover that the yelping dog had deceived me by hiding inside me. When their laughter and applause began to fade, I explained, "That was Governor Lamar," and I tossed up another head and captured it with my mouth, this time omitting the crunch. I grinningly rolled it about inside my cheeks and finally swallowed it without chewing.

"And that was his beautiful daughter, who spends your rightful wealth in tinselled theatrical displays," I announced, licking my lips. "Very tasty."

Through the renewed laughter, chiefly male, I spotted Rachel Vachel's gasp and stifled giggles behind me. If they had been any louder, I'd have thrown something at her, probably the mike at my feet. An actress who breaks up because of private on-stage jokes doesn't deserve the

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name. Of course I probably shouldn't have started making gags like that so soon, but at times one must instantly follow all inspirations of the muse.

I decided I could now risk feeding my audience a little more brain-food. "Silencio!" I decreed, and when they had quieted, I said, "Comrades, you are genial and generous. Far too generous. It concerns you that one mangy dog go hungry, and delights you that he be fed. Think equally of yourselves, I command. Think of your own empty bellies, I say." (Since it was well past supper-time I knew most of them would be feeling a bit hungry.) "For two hundred and fifty years you have been starved, enslaved, and exploited by the white Texans. That is something not to be endured — not by you and certainly not by me. It is to demand, in your name and with your help, payment in full — aye, and time and a half for overtime and double time on Sundays and holidays — for that quarter millennium of distasteful servitude — it is to achieve those things, I say, that I have come striding from my far country!"

And purely for the sake of variety, I drew myself up tall as I said that and drew close around me my cloak, reversed to show only its scarlet lining.

for something that is not theater."

"But only short hours ago I laid my hand on the shoulder of President Austin of Texas, and he died. The Longhorn dictator is dead! *I ate him*. That is a fact — fact like the death of a child or of a cockroach crushed underfoot."

Now I heard footsteps behind me, but I ignored them, determined to finish my serious pitch, driving it home as forcefully as I had my comedy.

"Comrades, it is one of my qualities that I can eat — and eat and eat — without ever becoming less hungry or growing a grain fatter. Death is never sated. Be you like me! Arise, destroy, feast. If in doing this you die yourselves, you only cross to my side of the fence and from there continue the battle. So you are invulnerable. My hand is forever over you — in comradeship and love. Let our watchword be: Vengeance and Death!"

I liked that so much I repeated it, this time with a falling, rumbling inflection like lights being turned off. "*Vengenza e Muerta!*"

I calculated there would be five seconds of stunned silence, then ragged cheers growing to a roar.

I got exactly three of those

first seconds — genuine stunned silence, all right.

Then great searchlights trumpeted on from all around, shaking us with high-pitched violet-white light that pulsed in an A-wave rhythm, disordering the brains, scanning mechanism and fragmenting vision.

Bullhorns and sirens glared on blindingly, shaking us with dazzling white noise which raced up and down from the scream of a billion billion bats to gut-loosening, fear-enforcing subsonics.

Only my theatrical training kept us from being incapacitated by this synthetic assault, which lasted ten seconds. I hit the floor and closed eyes and ears for that period.

The sixth-of-a-minute pandemonium hid the ponderous tread of huge horses closing in on my audience saddle-to-saddle on three sides, leaving open only the way back to Greaser town.

Then the darkly hooded Texans riding those horses cracked out simultaneously their long electric whips. In a great semicircle flashed the blue sparks of high voltage, low amperage. The fringes of my audience shrieked and writhed.

I turned around. Except for one figure besides myself, the bandstand was empty. The footsteps I had earlier heard had been my comrades of the Revolution tak-

ing a powder; El Toro, Father Francisco, Guchu, who had cried me on, La Cucaracha, who had proclaimed herself my eternal beloved, and all the other loyal ones whose names I hadn't had time to learn.

The one exception was Rachel Vachel. She was sitting in her chair, arms folded across her chest, gazing at me a cold question which I could not decipher.

I was glad that at least one had not fled. But why, I had to ask myself, wasn't she using her lightning pistols, or at least standing at my side?

Beyond her, more horsemen and at least one large vehicle were closing in on the bandstand.

Shouts and screams behind me made me turn again. What I saw paralyzed most of me, so I could only stand there, moving eyes and head.

They say actors are always playing parts, even in private life, that they can never truly feel. This one can. Now, expressing it in no fashion at all and so for no one's benefit but my own, I was simultaneously racked by exultation, horror and shame.

My audience was attacking the Texans. They were scrabbling about for rocks — fragments of aged-cracked tombstones, I sup-

pose — and occasionally finding and hurling one. A few had managed to get past the whips and were clubbing at horses' legs and snatching at stirrups ankles. I watched while two of them were cut sizzingly in half by the red beams of laser pistols. Three of them got hold of a whip by its insulated section and yanked on it while another Mex pushed upward the booted foot of the rider, toppling him from his saddle. They raced screeching to stomp him.

Yes, my audience was mounting an attack. And it was clear from my first glimpse of it that it had no chance whatever of success. Only two Rangers were in trouble, while over their hooded heads, the mouths of large weapons quested forward like swaying snakes.

And all this while members and groups of my audience — no of this mad revolutionary mob — were shouting, sometimes with hand outstretched toward me, my dreadful, melodramatic watchword. "*Venganza e Muerta!*"

Believe me, each utterance of that idiot phrase struck me like a lash. I, and I alone, had caused these dark-faced, dwarfish fools to fight, to suffer real wounds, even to die, instead of running off safe — for it had been shown that the Texans' whips, at first at least, had been set only to



shock and pain, not to kill or even stun.

I could no more have cried ~~them~~ on now than I could kill my father. Yet my mere motionless presence was causing them to keep up the hopeless battle, was sending more of them to their deaths. And my presence was in no way due to courage, but only shock and sheer stupidity. Yet so long as I stood there, I was ~~their~~ black flag, driving them on, forbidding retreat. Why, I had even promised the poor fools deathlessness, as the Old Man of the Mountains had the Hashishin. Oh, why hadn't my comrades told me that the play was over and I must run with them? Why had they left the ignorant actor to suffer or at least view the consequences of his vaunting performance? Perhaps even now I should try to call off the little morons dying and suffering agonies around me.

I might have tried it, but at that moment several actual lashes struck me, and I was enveloped in a cloud of blue sparks and ozone.

But I was neither killed, paralyzed, pained, or set awrithing. I felt only a slight tingling.

Since my skeleton was ~~exo~~, the chances were at least four in five that a lash would land first on it, grounding out neatly through my titanium footplates

and the aluminum handstand, rather than shock my flesh.

With the further realization that my seeming immunity to the whips would increase my imbecile followers' trust in me, I laughed wildly.

The bandstand was bumped, and it rocked. I heard a familiar voice growl loudly, "Cut those whips!"

I turned once more and saw I mashed up against the bandstand, almost like an extension of it, the aluminum flatbed of a big truck. From it strode Sheriff Chase and Ranger Hunt, drawing their ceremonial swords. Possibly they had figured out that my power was of a mythic or legendary sort, lying in my impersonation of El Esqueleto or the Tall Death, and that therefore it would be highly appropriate and also impressive to the Mexicans if they cowed me or cut me down with anachronistic weapons.

Possibly — yet by this perhaps shrewd action of theirs, they changed the whole situation for me and created for themselves a danger they could hardly have foreseen. Suddenly, for me, everything was theater again — theater in deadly earnest, perhaps, but still theater.

As those two big, gleaming, exceedingly sharp-looking ra-

piers came toward me, I crossed hands to touch three buttons on my wristplates.

One of them simply doubled the speed and strength of my exoskeletal movements. It put my exo-motors in high. This was dangerous to me: a motor, meeting sudden resistance, might burn out; I might smash myself in a powered fall or collision. But it was also necessary, especially if Chase or Hunt were even moderately skilled swordsmen. The other two buttons untelescoped my slim canes — and this time I continued button-pressure until the final needle-tipped sections were extruded. I tossed off my cloak.

Then with a stamp that bounced me a foot in the air and with an uncalled for but most enheartening, "On guard!" I was upon them.

There were two basic ways in which two swordsmen can engage a single opponent armed with two swords. They can try to take him from opposite sides, forcing him to keep turning his head 180 degrees, cutting off his fastest lines of retreat, and aiming to pin him between them.

Or they can attack him side by side. To engage both their swords, he must face them chest on, presenting them with a wider and closer target than either of them present to him.

In both cases the doubly armed lone swordsman has available to him tactics which partially compensate him. To begin with, he always has the advantage of a single command opposing a shared command: Hannibal versus Paulus and Varro at Cannae, etc.

Attacked on opposite sides, he can seek to overwhelm and kill one of his opponents with a very fast attack before the other can get at him.

Facing opponents who attack him side by side, he can concentrate his attention and tactics, particularly if he has good and well trained peripheral vision and is ambidexterous, in both which abilities I rank high. By swift enough circling he can put one of his adversaries temporarily out of the fight.

In short, according to the tactic his opponents adopt, he has two basic tactics: the fast attack and swift circling.

In my first engagement with Hunt and Chase, I chose a third tactic. In fact, I invented it on this occasion. It has nothing whatever to recommend it, except that it will startle the enemy, though without harming them.

After a slow, one-two advance, I launched myself in a great and very rapid lunge at Chase, my

right-hand adversary, seeking to catch his blade in a bind in high seconde and skewer him, meanwhile fending off Hunt's sword with the hanging guard. It was a great mistake.

One: I had not allowed for the actor's ingrained habit of always missing his opponent rather than hitting him. Two: I had not really allowed for the speed-up in my motors, with no corresponding speed-up in my nervous system. I took off so fast on my left foot that I couldn't get my right foot ahead to catch my weight.

There seemed only one thing to do. Parrying both their swords in seconde — simply shoving them aside the easiest way, that is — I doubled sharply at waist and shoulders, turning my lunge into a forward somersault, straight between my adversaries. For a Thin, I am an excellent freefall acrobat. The feat I intended was exactly like a forward somersault in free fall, but with one slight difference: midway I would have to take a tremendous bump on the head; I could only try to get spun far enough around so that it would be a crash of headbasket rather than a crunch of frontal bone; I could also pray that the Longhairs had forged my exo-spine exceeding strong.

Perhaps Diana, almost overhead and smiling through clear

sky, decided to be kind and worked a miracle. At any rate, there were simultaneous great bongs, bass and treble, of titanium and aluminum. My sworded arms thrown backward gave my upper body forward impetus. The weight of my footplates drew me down to a landing on them. There was bandstand left to land on. Though reverberating and groggy from head to foot, I managed to keep my balance and turn around and get both swords up and engage Hunt and Chase as they came at me side by side.

At that point I resolutely turned my brain off, especially its schemy sector, and let reflex and training take over. I defended only. I fought no habit of mine, including the actor's habit of never laying sword point or edge on his adversary. In fact now for me, at least, the duel had become rather like that fabled one in the American Civil War, where an actor on the Union side meets in battle an old fellow-actor on the Confederate side and yells, "Primes, cully, primes," whereupon they most spiritedly fight the duel of Macbeth to the great edification of their fellow soldiers on both sides.

As my body and nerves recovered, I automatically went on

the attack, cautiously this time. Hunt and Chase proved to be mediocre duellists. I drove them back across the bandstand. Yet I scrupulously avoided pricking or scratching them with my point — actor's habit completely in the ascendancy, or perhaps by now I was beginning to realize that my only chance of surviving this first and thoroughly lost battle of the Bent-Back Revolution lay in my not killing or hurting anyone.

Nevertheless, I took advantage of a pause in the duel to cry, "Fight, cowards, fight! There'd never have been an Alamo if the place had had a back door!"

Hunt, resting his sword-hand on his knee, retorted, "You're worse than dirt, Crockett La Cruz, putting dirt on the name you bear of one of the great Texan military martyrs."

"Davy Crockett never died at the Alamo," I countered. "He had too much brains — brains enough to solve the no-back-door problem. That early long-hair — or proto-hippie — pulled a sneak and married a senorita, from which union I am descended."

These insults made Hunt and Chase fence more furiously and worse. With a sudden bind in tierce followed by a heavy beat in seconde, I sent Hunt's sword flying out of his hand. Then,

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having both cane-swords to use on Chase, I disarmed him too.

I stood menacing both men, whom I had almost driven off the front edge of the bandstand.

Between them, I saw the last of my audience-army running madly toward Greasertown, away from the pursuing whips. My little assassins, drugged like the Old Man's with hemp, had at last admitted defeat. Here and there lay a few unmoving bent-back bodies. A few others struggled, pinned down and to each other by a sticky white foam which lay in swaths.

At that moment, the last half-dozen Mexes in flight — my pitiable rearguard — paused to raise clenched fists and shout toward me, *Ole, El Esqueleto! Venganza e Muerta!* Then they were running again, and the pursuing Texan calvary cut them off from my view.

Perhaps it was that little cheer, perhaps it was hearing Governor Lamar's voice from the flatbed that roused my idiot optimism again. Suddenly my brain was back with me, full of melodramatic plans. I would seize Lamar and menacing him with a sword, demand my release. I would —

As I turned, full of wild speculations, Rachel Vachel, risen at last and come forward, was facing me.

"My hero!" she cried as she

lifted her arms toward me. "Oh Captain Skull, that was most brilliantly dueled! I doubt another man in the universe could have —

Her face was radiant. I lowered my cane-swords to either side. What I did not notice until too late was that in one of her hands she held her black crop. With it she touched me neatly on my naked neck, like a fairy godmother enacting an enchantment.

Pain shot through me, followed by paralysis of all parts below my head. I heard myself sit down with a clank on the aluminum. My upper body would have sprawled forward, doubled over, except that my useless outflung arms kept me propped up, while my eyes first stared hurt, then glared hatred at my betrayer.

There were loud sighs of satisfaction from Chase and Hunt behind me.

Meanwhile Lamar came hurrying from the flatbed, followed by Mayor Burleson and Professor Fanninowicz.

The Governor's courtly features were red with rage. He grabbed his daughter by her upper arms and shook her.

"Sugar, I'm intensely angry with you," he said in tones that were both well and yet barely controlled. "I'm going to lock

you in your bedroom for twenty years."

"But Daddy, I saved your life," she protested in a voice that went up an octave and back at least a decade into her past.

"That's not the point. Sugar, I'm ashamed of you. It's a scandal. Dressing like a man. Wearing pants, when there hasn't a lady of the Lamars rode anything but sidesaddle for two centuries. Ten years bedroom confinement for you anyhow."

"Daddy, you're in a temper. What's soured you? Didn't you get President Austin?"

Here I began to have difficulty following their dialogue. It wasn't that my unconsciousness was wavering — no, above my neck I remained fully alive, though paralyzed below, so far as sensation and voluntary muscles were concerned. It was that Fanninowicz now knelt beside me, his whole face gleaming like his monocle, and began to finger my exoskeleton with little gasps of pleasure as he traced the courses of its cables and the myoelectric leads to my skin. He even began to palpate and pinch my numb flesh, softly chortling with wonder at how little there was of it over my big bones. It was vile, but I endured it (what else?) and concentrated on what Lamar and Rachel Vachel were saying.

He answered her question pettishly.

"Oh, we got Austin all right. But then his Mex houseboys, who'd run away, laid an ambush for us. Beamed three Texas Rangers dead. Missed me by just *that!*" He spread forefinger and thumb. "And by the time we'd dropped a miniatomic bomb on them, they'd scattered so I don't think we got more than fifty per cent."

"Aw, cheer up, Daddy, you probably got mor'n you think. And you know yourself how your nerves get whangled when you're wearied and stayed up too late and not had your proper liquor and weed, and been threatened with death, like when you catch cold."

"Don't you try to soften me up, sugar. I'm making it five years and not a day less. And what I say goes."

"That's right, Daddy, it sure does," the incredible female agreed contritely. "Gee whillikens!" she added with a grin. "And now it goes double. I forgot — You're president of Texas!"

"Even *that's* in doubt," he said, his voice almost cracking. "The Establishment Council's been talking of Burleson and Hunt too, and even Ma Hogg. Not *that* I hold it personally against you boys," he added.

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"Course not, Governor. Course not," the soothing deep-throated replies sounded around me.

"And that's not the point either, sugar," Lamar continued, grabbing his daughter again. "It's you. It's you I'm ashamed of. Wearing those pants that show off your legs as if you were bare-naked. Consorting with filthy, stinking, low revolutionaries —"

"But Daddy, I *had* to dress like this so as to be able to consort with them so as to be able to learn their revolutionary secrets. It's a mighty big thing I've done for Texas. I admit they smell bad, but I bore it so as to —"

"Secrets!" he interrupted scornfully. "Sugar, there aren't any revolutionary secrets. Again and again I've told you to keep out of politics your cute little nose, that reminds me so of your sainted, admirably docile mother's. We've known all about this revolution for years. It never gets anywhere. It's just a safety valve for the greasers. I admit that President Austin arming his houseboys has tickled it up a bit, but that doesn't really mean anything. No, sugar, you've been wicked and disobedient, and it's five months locked in the bedroom for you."

Here Fanninowicz tried to examine the containers in my cheek-plates, and I snapped at

Instead of being soberly impressed, or rather in addition to being impressed, my audience all laughed hugely.

Leaning toward La Cucaracha, who sat at the opposite end of the chair-row from Rachel Vachel, I asked under cover of the joyful noise, "Why am I getting a laugh on the red cloak?"

"Because our bill collectors traditionally wear a red suit," she replied with commendable brevity, beaming at me.

"Go, man, go!" Guchu cried encouragingly.

"I think he goes too far," Father Francisco also took advantage of the opportunity to put in, mutteringly. "I think he is of the devil."

"Contrary to my first expectations, you're doing excellently," El Toro assured me. "Only harken to the wise father. Don't go too far."

"What sort of revolutionaries are you?" I demanded of them in a contemptuous hissing whisper. "Too far? You haven't seen anything yet. And you, *padre*, just watch my devil's smoke!"

And in a swirl of red cloak I turned my back on them before any could reply.

Taking advantage of the dope I'd got from Kookie, I pantomimed a bill collector walking up to the tall door of White Texas,

rapping on it authoritatively (footplate stamps, hidden by my cloak, providing the noise), pounding on it when that got no answer, and finally telling the one who opened it, "Senor Gringo, I intend to stand here, to your great shame, until you have made payment in full — aye, and in double measure, running over — to each and every noble Mexican, noble Indian, and noble Negro alive or dead!"

As the applause for that act faded, I turned slowly on my audience with a great pointing finger that took them all in. The red of my cloak had entirely vanished, I was all black and silver again. Leaning toward them confidentially, with the effect of elbow on knee and chin in palm, and driving home my points with slow forefinger-shakes of my other hand, I said in my deepest voice, "You laugh. You enjoy yourselves. That is well . . . now. But you and I, comrades, know we will never get anywhere at all by standing at the door and asking, or even demanding. Never did even a husband get his wife by such behavior. You and I know we must burst down that door and seize what is ours by right. You and I, old comrades of the Revolution, know we must *fight*, that we must risk death and if necessary deal death for our aims."

**S**uddenly I was no longer Christopher Crockett La Cruz, juvenile leading man of the Theater of the Sphere. I was no longer a gangling and sexstruck spaceling caught up in a perilous but ridiculous Terran bruhaha. No, I was Cassius working on the noble Brutus. I was Sam Adams inciting puritanic rowdies called Sons of Liberty to perpetrate the famous floating tea party. I was Camille Desmoulins demanding the storming of the Bastille. I was Danton roaring for the head of Louis XVI. I was John Brown forging the sword of Abolition. I was Lenin telling the wavering Congress of Soviets, "We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist order!" I was Comrade Mao beginning the Long March. I was Malcolm X founding Black Nationalism. I was Senator Whatshisname rising to demand a vote of censure against that administration's war policy in Vietnam —

What I said was, "Comrade, you outnumber your oppressors ten to one, and now you have my help from beyond the grave. True, your oppressors are bigger than you, taller than you, and they possess engines of infinite power. But they are big with the soft bigness of men whose bodies have outgrown their untried, unforged courage and conscience. Outside they are tall, but within

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they are pygmies, moved only by vanity and greed, knowing nothing of true want, which is the mother of all true feeling. While no engine is as powerful as the man who seizes and controls it.

"Have you never seen a man sweating and writhing, struck down by bite of scorpion or spider smaller far than he? Mighty armies have been conquered by invisible bacteria. Comrades, your foes are few, and they have been weakened by sloth, greed, and corruption. Be you as scorpions and spiders! Now is the time to strike!"

There was a hiss of surprise behind me. So I was startling my colleagues too? So much the better!

I stood tall again, eerie and distant, yet my comrades' friend. Now I was Frankenstein's monster, I was Danton on trial, I was Lazarus returned, I was Lon Chaney in *The Phantom of the Opera*, I was the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse, dismounted.

"Comrades," I pronounced, "only you and I know the great gap between talking and action, between words and deeds. Only minutes ago, I amused you by pretending to eat the heads of some of the puny great ones of Texas. That was funny, I trust — good theater, as we say — and also, I hope, a prophecy now



his hand, almost getting a finger. He appeared to bear me no more resentment than if I'd been a surly chimpanzee under restraint. He merely turned his attention to my wristplates, his fingers hovering over the buttons in a spasm of fascination and hesitation.

"You cain't mean it, Daddykins!" Rachel Vachel wailed. "What's more, it's just not true what you say about knowing everything about the Revolution. It's been changing, Daddy. There's nigras in it now, nigras from the Pacific Black Republic. And there's Injuns too."

"Sugar, you can't sweeten me, no matter what you — Nigras from the Black Republic, did you say? And Indians? Not Comanches, I hope." His voice went high.

"Yes, Comanches, Daddy, and Apaches. And there is space-folk! The La Cruz person admitted to me that —"

"That's another thing I'm holding against you!" he interrupted her. "Early this evening you were snuggling concupiscently with that low Sackabond actor, who on his own admission is no more than a dirty-minded jester to the mad Longhairs of Circumluna. I saw you. I always knew acting and actors would be your ruin, sugar. My sentence remains the same: five months in

a locked bedroom, on pinto beans, cornpone and Coca Cola."

"But Daddy, that was my greatest hour. I was bein' a better lil ole agent provocateur than the best pros turned out by Hunt Espionostics. You think I enjoyed it? It was like snuggling up to a giant spider. But I called on my deepest wells o' courage and —"

I would have said something ferocious then, except Fanninowicz chose that moment to press experimentally one of the buttons on my right wristplate. My right cane-sword retracted, scraping aluminum, while the German beat his knuckles together and softly tittered in ecstasy. I sagged toward that side.

"And that's not all, Daddy," Rachel was saying. "There's something else I got to tell you, but it's a private sort of thing, and I'm a little embarrassed about it. Would you other menfolk mind stepping out of hearing for a minute? Just to humor poor little me?"

With murmurings of "Sure thing, Miss Lamar," and "Anything to please the Honorable," Burleson, Hunt and Chase went to the other end of the bandstand, the last dragging the reluctant Fanninowicz.

Rachel took hold of her father's lapel and drew his face

close to her own, meanwhile bending down, so they were both very near me.

He rasped in an angry whisper, "What's all this, sugar? You are not going to tell me you've been intimate with this skyborn abortion?"

"Shut up, Daddy," she whispered with something of a return to her old authority. "Remember how Icky Elmo said La Cruz had large mining interests in North Texas and he denied it? Well, he has 'em, Daddy, as he admitted to me while reelin' from my charms. And I didn't do a thing more than Ma would have done when so much was at stake. What's more, his mining interests consist of the original map and claim to the *Lost Crazy-Russian Pitchblende Mine!*"

"How can you be sure of that?" Lamar demanded sharply, though keeping his voice down. "I even had the linings of his luggage unstitched and all areas chemicaled for invisible inks, and there wasn't a document of any sort discovered."

"He carries them on his person, Daddy. He told me so. So all you have to do is search that creepy-crawly black suit of his at some moment when those vultures over there aren't around, and you'll be the sole owner of the valuablest property in all North Texas, maybe the world!"

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Tears came into Lamar's eyes. In a tremulous whisper he said, "Sugar, I've misjudged you unforgiveably. You're a true Lamar of the finer sex, perhaps the truest and finest ever drew breath. Of course I'll still have to give you one days' room arrest so the others don't smell a rat. But after that — Why, if you like, I'll put a million on the line to hire Nembo-Nembo out of Florida Democracy to paint your 3D portrait — they say he's the world's greatest. I'll underwrite a production of *Texiana* with a solid-gold surrey and diamond-encrusted hoopskirts on all the chorus girls and — "

"Senor Lamar!" I interrupted, unable to bear her perfidy and his stupidity a moment longer. "There are a few other secrets your dear daughterkins hasn't told you. Such as what she really thinks about your lousy taste in theater, your antimacassar lighthouses, and your provincial, yokelish notions concerning the intercourse of the sexes. Do you know what she calls you? 'The genteelest jail warden in all Texas!' 'The courtly old Cromwell!' While hidden in her lingerie drawers, she has — "

Again the fairy-godmother wand reached out, this time touching the center of my forehead and bestowing on me the benison of oblivion.



### The Invisible Prison

**A**s consciousness worked its way back into me, starting deep inside and moving blindly toward my eyes, the first thing I became aware of was pain.

The pain was everywhere and came mostly from being tightly tied with a thousand ropes or a hundred thousand hairs to a flat hard surface with wide cracks in it. But I was thirsty too. There was only enough moisture in my mouth to glue my tongue to its roof. And I had the kind of weakness that told me I needed food, though the thought of food nauseated me. I also needed some sort of pills. On top of that my feet were burning up.

My head was tied, left ear down against my shoulder, numbing the latter and mashing it into the flat, cracked surface. The down ear, mashed too, heard only my thudding heartbeat.

The sound frightened me. It was very labored. My arms were strapped down to either side, so that I lay on my back in a cruciform position which was symmetrical except for my head turned to the left. The contact between my dorsal flesh and the

I tried to think where in the Sack or Circumluna was a big surface like that. The only one I could recall was a big abstraction made of thin slabs of rare moon-marble. So Murray the mosaic-worker had decided to incorporate me into his greatest work of art! Visualizing carefully from onlooker-viewpoint I decided the effect would be striking, moving, even beautiful.

But did they untie me at intervals so that I could rest, drink and eat, or was I a permanent part of the mosaic? There seemed something wrong about using a highly talented actor for such a purpose, no matter how tremendous the effect. But then artists and photographers are single-minded clots. Some of them won't even read a book or go to the theater.

Photography reminded me that I must explain to Murray that a good life-size solidograph of me portraying naked agony would do just as well or even better for his mosaic and free me to go back to the La Cruz Theater of the Sphere, where I was needed and could express my own varied inward visions, not just one of his.

**B**y now the burning sensation had traveled up into my calves.

Into my darkened mind there

GALAXY

flat, hard surface was intimate. I realized I was naked.

floated a dim picture of Rachel Vachel and Fanninowicz gloating over me, the latter saying, "Clearly he will require no other restraint," the girl agreeing, "That's for sure, Fanny. He looks as if he'd been glued down yesterday with a quart of stick-tite. Or like a mashed giant spider."

gaps in my memory of the last half of my trip to Terra. Evidently when gravitation sickness had struck, it had struck hard.

The picture was replaced by a motion one of Fanninowicz battling wildly with Chase and Hunt. The professor's mouth was open and working, as if he were shouting at them, although I now heard nothing. From time to time he pointed behind me.

I never saw a man who looked  
With such a wistful eye  
Upon that little tent of blue  
Which prisoners call the sky.

— "The Ballad of Reading Gaol,"  
by Oscar Wilde



So Terra's most hysterical personality-changer had also been a sadist. I hoped I had paid back my tall innamorata well in the only coin women understand, before returning to the Sack. Why in Pluto's name had Murray tied me down so cruelly? I wished there weren't so many

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He was the more active fighter, but the two bigger men were drunkenly getting the better of him. A bottle crashed and splashed soundlessly. For some reason Fanninowicz was on my side, and I desperately wanted him to win. It didn't make sense.

Then the vampire-smiling Ra-

chel Vachel floated back again, but this time with her father. Suddenly I could remember sounds again, for Lamar was saying, "Don't you fret, sugar, we'll get those papers out of him if we have to skin him alive!"

For some unknown reason, this grisly sentiment made me laugh uproariously. The laughter came out as a strangling and highly painful series of dry croaks, but it helped wake me up. I dragged my eyes open.

My surmise was correct. I was glued to Murray's masterpiece.

But something must be very wrong with my memory, because I didn't recall his Sack-famed mosaic being anything this huge or violently colored. He must have extended it and touched it up with 17 different hues of paint — and Murray was an artist who favored fallow tones, such as me and my skin. And wouldn't even a clot of an artist have much too much taste, or mere brute instinct, than to paint over the ghostly shades of moon-marble?

And why, besides myself, had Murray also glued to his revised mosaic many jagged fragments of brown, green and clear glass, several smashed chairs and tables (how had he ever wangled these out of the Museum of Ter-

ran Domestic Artifacts and got permission to destroy them?), numerous pillows, a lightning pistol, an intact monocle, and — flat on his back — *Mayor Atomic Bill Burleson of Dallas, Texas, Texas?*

That last brought me back to reality with a bang. I simply couldn't see Burleson sacrificing himself for a work of art, especially another man's — something I myself might do in certain moods.

No, I clearly was back in Governor Lamar's patio, and there had been a sizable brawl last night. Burleson, I now noted, had his head on a pillow and was snoring in the shade like a drunkard well soused. While the burning sensation in my lower extremities, which had now reached my knees, was the morning sunlight creeping across the patio.

I must do something before it crawled high as my belly and chest, I told myself for a long frantic moment which ended as soon as I faced up to my helplessness.

My exoskeleton and sack suit were gone. The million invisible hairs pinning me down were simply the force of Terran gravity. I could wriggle my fingers and toes. I could open and shut my lower jaw. Otherwise I could not bend a joint. The way my head

was placed, I could not even look down at my body. I only got a foreshortened view of my left arm coming out from under my cheek.

I let my gaze wander out. The landscape which last night had been romantic, now looked dismal and sunblasted almost as Luna's. The few trees drooped. The truncated cones, small and large, shimmered in the heat waves like chesspieces designed by a computer. Else there was nothing but a plain of pale brown dust.

Except for the big swimming pool, everything looked dry as the inside of my mouth felt. Even the faintly blue sky appeared dehydrated. While I was robbed of billions of molecules of my slender supply of moisture by each breath I drew of the desiccated air.

Now through the last there came flapping across the pool two tiny swatches — yes, Rachel's description had been precise — of black and orange batik. With a longing that was almost worship, my eyes followed the delightfully erratic movements of the flutterby. For that must be the true derivation, mangled by comedians. How can butter fly? Every atom of me yearned toward and revered the delicate whimsical creature. She had conquered gravity, while *Homo*

*christophorus sculliansis* definitely had not. She fluttered out of sight.

My longing altered without changing direction. Now I passionately wanted my exoskeleton, as if it were my metal Stamese twin brother or a new robot wife.

It must have been removed from me last night while I was still unconscious from the touch of Rachel's black wand, or from further shocking or drugging. Perhaps on the pretext of rendering me helpless or tormenting me, but ultimately so that Rachel Vachel and her father could remove my sack suit and hunt through it for the claim to and the map of the Lost Crazy-Russian Pitchblende Mine. That made me chuckle again, despite torment to my uvula.

I scanned all the patio I could. Trusty Old Titanium was nowhere in sight, though he (she?) might lie hidden behind one of the couches.

Perhaps I was foolish to believe my exoskeleton would have been left on the patio, but I thought not. True. Fanninowicz would have taken it away with him if at all possible, but my last recollection of the professor was his enthusiastic manhandling by Chase and Hunt. Most likely he had departed under restraint or on a stretcher.

Someone else with a rudimentary sense of caution or tidiness would have taken it away? Why, they hadn't even bothered to take away Bjrleson, who lay snoring as sincerely as ever. Most of the others would have been close to dead drunk too. Might Rachel have taken it away? To fondle it in bed? Ridiculous — she hated me.

I recalled Fanninowicz pointing over me during the fight. At what? My stripped-off exoskeleton, I suddenly felt sure. Why would I have felt involved in the fight, unless it had been about my exoskeleton? I yearned for the impossible: that I could turn over and peer behind me. Though what use just looking at it would do me, I did not know, except to make me more miserable, if that were possible.

Then another reason occurred to me why my exo might have been carelessly left behind. All the Texans would have assumed that I would be utterly unable to stir without it. They would have forgotten, as *I myself had up to this moment*, the preternatural power in my fingers, toes, and jaw. And come to think of it, not even Rachel had seen my handshake fight with El Toro.

With a shudder of hope that made my hair rise (small but auspicious victory over gravity), I walked my left hand to my

thigh, dragging my flaccid arm behind it. It was easy. My fingers found purchase in the cracks between the tessellations and hardly felt the weight they dragged behind them.

Now the task was more difficult: to walk my hand across my body, lifting the dead weight of my arm during the first half of the trip. But I am moderately hirsute around my crotch. By pinching hold of tufts of hair with outstretched fingers and then crooking them sharply, and by digging my rather thick, long fingernails into my flesh, careless of pain, I swiftly accomplished the job. Indeed, my hand proved to be a most able little five-limbed mountain climber.

During the trip my fingers felt the heat of direct sunlight, reminding me I had no time to lose.

The descent had been a breeze despite the friction between my dragged left arm and body. Now my left fingers blindly found cracks again and began to walk both away from my body and up toward the line of my shoulders.

Meanwhile I walked my right hand up toward my right armpit, to provide a cushion for my head, when and if it turned over, and also to be a brace and obstacle, so that my left hand would have its chance to turn

my body over, not slide it across the pavement.

At the same time, by moving my jaw first right then left, I started to walk my head off my left shoulder, which had begun to lift, and across my chest. The stubble on my chin — I had not shaved since departure from Circumluna — helped, though in this area I made little progress.

My left fingers were really working hard now. Thumb and middle finger would crook in a crack, while my forefinger and ring finger groped forward seeking another crack, in which they could seat their tips and take up the crooking or pulling job. Little finger helped which pair needed her most.

A quarter of my back was lifted off the pavement now. There was a sharp pain in my left shoulder. I feared it would dislocate — ghost muscles are little use in holding together joints subjected to strain. My eyes, slit-lidded, were looking almost straight up into the bright pale sky.

There was a moment when I feared I'd never make it. But then my fingers found a providentially wide and suitably curving crack in which they could all pull together. My head rolled over so that it lay with temple on right shoulder, chin on right fist. My hips turned then, so

that left was directly above right. For the present I let them remain that way, my body lying on my right side. Most of the front of my body was in shade at last, though other areas of it were newly exposed to the bright sunlight, which had now moved as high as my hips and was stinging me hard.

Suddenly feeling very apprehensive I blinked my eyes twice, then forced them to look dispassionately toward the house-end of the patio.

Facing me and grotesquely seated in a chair not four meters away was my exoskeleton with my sack suit tossed across it.

But both my titanium humerus and femurs had been bent almost double, so that their cables curled and dangled. The delicate lattice of my ribs had been crushed in almost out of recognition. My head-basket had numerous dents. One cheek plate had been bent out. While my sack suit had been slashed to black ribbons.

Really, it had considerable power as a semi-accidental work of art. In fact, it brought tears to my eyes — tears which I hated because I now loathed any power of Texans to make me emote, but more because tears robbed me of moisture I could ill afford to lose.



For now my most urgent need was water, along with some sort of relief from the unending strain of gravity and the burning, dehydrating heat of the sun.

I would not ask Texans for help, even if anyone would come in answer to my croaking calls. I resolutely repressed from my mind the vision of Chase and Hunt demonstrating their drunken strength last night by bending my exo-humeruses and -femurs, and tromping my rib-cage. It had been to prevent that, of course, that Fanainowicz had fought them: he loved my exo even if he didn't love me.

There was no use whatever in regretting the past, or in gloating with a masochistic self-pity over the indignities done me and my dear exo.

My body must have known my intentions before I did — or else, already in the fringes of dehydration delirium, I was beginning to act by instinct rather than reason — for while I had been thinking those thoughts, my left hand had toppled my body over onto my chest. Now, aided by my fresh right fingers crooking and crawling under my chin, it was walking in a direction that would hopefully drag my whole body around and head me for the swimming pool.

My toppling over had left me with my right leg twisted under

my left. But now my well-muscled toes got to work, first untwisting my legs, then finding cracks and aiding me to claw my way toward my new goal.

At last I was turned enough so that I could see it. Because it was almost brimful, my eyes could even glimpse from their slight altitude the great sheet of lovely glimmering silver. It made me think of how comfortable and snug I'd felt sandwiched between my water-mattresses aboard the *Tsiolkovsky*, totally embraced by sheeted liquid except for a hole over my face.

My fingers and toes redoubled their efforts. I told myself that once I was floating on my back in that delectable H<sub>2</sub>O, its coolth erasing the sun's sting, my whole body exquisitely hydrating again — that then I could ponder my next move and easily conceive some brilliant plan to thwart my captors. But for the present I must concentrate on finger- and toe- and maybe even chin-crawling, lugging my inert body to the reviving fluid.

The whole course ahead of me was literally scattered with broken glass. I chose a curving and recurving route, which would miss the worst, but take me close to Burleson's feet. Most of it would be through direct sunlight, but that did not worry

me, now that my belly and chest were in shade.

I soon discovered that I could keep my head upright on my chin without the aid of my right hand, which was more efficiently employed like my left — stretched far ahead and finding cracks by which to pull myself forward, a job which my toes had to do blindly. Quick work with my chin would keep my head from toppling to either side or from falling forward, robbing me of my vision.

Of course my chin was getting well-scraped in the process, as was all of my ventral region, but this was inevitable.

At first I would walk a hand and with a finger flick out of my path any but the tiniest fragments of glass.

But then my whistling breath, an increasing ache in my throat, dizzy spells or a return of the centrifuge illusion, and a sense of being engulfed in almost endurable heat made me realize I had only a very limited time left in which to reach the water that would save my life.

Now I flicked out of the way only the largest and most wicked-looking fragments. My chin avoided most of the others, which accumulated under the top of my chest, where they scratched and stabbed.

As I approached Burleson in

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my giant-inchworm fashion, I saw his eyes open and stare at me, at first incuriously, then with a certain groggy but not over-great horror, as if I were only one more grotesque denizen of the world of hangover. He lifted to his lips an open green bottle, which his right hand had been snugged around, glug-glugged a while, and relapsed once more into his shut-eyed sprawl.

It tells much about my desperation and depletion of resources at that time, that I did not then see anything the least funny about his actions. I was merely glad to get past the big slob's huge shoes, one more landmark in advance.

I didn't bother any more about the glass, though I was aware of certain new sharp pains in my chest and belly, and also of a warm slime which made travel easier. Actually I no longer even saw the glass, I saw only my watery goal. My fingers, toes and chin were moving on their own initiative. I had turned into a team of two hands, two feet and a jaw, harnessed to a vast indefinite load which had to be dragged like a travois. My brain filled with useless visions; of freefall swims in the huge high-surface-tension water-drop which is Circumluna's pride, of Elmo harranging me on the grandeurs and glories of Texas, of tales of

burning deserts, of my mother nursing me, of my father trying to explain to me what oceans were, and so on.

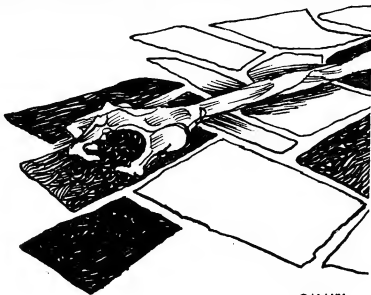
As my fingers touched at last the edge of the pool and longed to climb down in at once, a measure of sanity returned to me. I realized it would be a tricky business to get myself into the pool on my back, for if I floated on my face, I would have no way to get my nose and mouth out of the water.

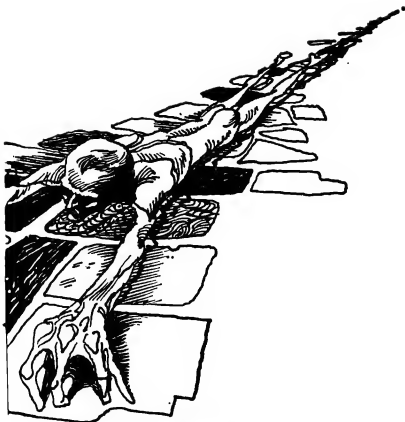
Accordingly, although my consciousness was now wavering and every cell of my body screaming for moisture, I made myself crawl through a curve until the

entire right side of my body was lying along the edge of the pool — me still belly down, of course. Then I walked my left foot back of my right so my legs were again crossed.

Next I worked my right hand under my chin, clutching the edge of the pool with it, and walked my left hand as far ahead as I could and then down over the edge of the pool where it found a convenient negative ledge.

All this while my eyes had been feasting on the water, as the thoughts of a lonely rocket pilot on his fuel. My right elbow, dipped in the stuff, knew chilly bliss. But there was a tiny admixture





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of apprehension. That water looked deep. But I reminded myself that one floated as readily over ten meters of water as over two — or over ten kilometers of H<sub>2</sub>O (incredible oceanic datum).

I strongly crooked the fingers of my left hand. My right hand stood up under my chin. I opened my mouth wide and my head tipped over toward the pool. At the same time my left toes found the same negative ledge my left fingers had, and they crooked too. My left hip rose.

As I teetered there, prolonging my agony a delicious moment and reminding myself of the precautions to take in water, I decided I must have started hallucinating, for I saw a long pink snake uncoil its tail downward from a top-story window of the patio and its long pale pink head emerge and begin to sway.

But maybe that super-cobra wasn't hallucination, for next I saw Mayor Burleson sit up and stare at his feet. Then his gaze slowly followed what I realized must be the blood track I had left, until he was looking for me.

I took a deep breath and toppled myself over. I landed with a splash on my back, precisely as I'd planned.

Cold shock almost knocked me senseless. Then, although consciousness was still wavering and vision blurring, I began to be

happy. Water is ersatz freefall, but good ersatz. I let it into my mouth, little by little. Nectar. I swiftly exhaled, remembering to do so through the nose, then took another deep breath. I discovered that the blurring was mostly water in my eyes.

I rolled away from the poolside as far as the leash of my right arm let me, then in reaction rolled back. Through my one eye above water I watched Burleson reeling both from alcohol and my disordered vision. As he followed my spoor to the poolside, his arms hung slackly, one still holding the green bottle. His head was bent down until his jowls were multiplied. He looked so much like a huge stupid dog who had been taught to walk on his hind legs — and to guzzle — but nothing else, that I would have laughed except I noted in time that my mouth and nose were both underwater.

Behind him and even more out of focus, the hyper-serpent illusion or reality continued. Now the thicker section I had first taken for the serpent's head was midway to the ground. Perhaps it was something which the snake had swallowed in the top-storey room.

Burleson kept getting bigger and funnier. He was near enough for me to note the owlish solem-

nity of his downward gaze.

Then he made a sloppy swinging grab at my right hand, missed, and almost fell in beside me. After teetering a long second on the brink — a mountain about to topple over sideways — he got his balance again. His first act was to take two more slugs from the green bottle. Then he aimed his gaze very carefully at my hand, spread the fingers of his own free hand for a second grab — and was funny no longer.

I did not want to be pulled from the pool only one-quarter restored. I did not want to be pulled from the pool period. I did not want to fall again into the hands of Texans. The pool was not the best base of operations, but at least it was a base, from which I might for a while be able to conduct independent negotiations.

Besides, I did not want to be near Burleson if he fell or dove into the pool. The wave he created might well swamp or overturn me. So as he grabbed again, I boldly pushed off from the pool's wall with a brisk back-hand flick of my right hand. I intended to paddle myself with my fin-clenched fingers to the pool's center, waiting developments.

The flick lifted my face from the water. I took another very deep breath.

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It was well for me I did so, for the next thing that happened was that I began to sink. When I opened my eyes I was looking up through several centimeters of water — centimeters which rather rapidly became decimeters. I energetically flapped my finger-fins downward. It slightly slowed, but did not halt my descent.

Too late, it was crystal-clear what had happened to me. With my preponderance of bone and almost total lack of fat, I massed considerably more than an equivalent volume of water and so was inevitably going down. I should have foreseen it, but who ever thinks of one's specific gravity, especially in freefall?

How I wish now that I had inherited my mother's pyknic tendencies and grown up a Fat! — even though it would have almost certainly resulted in me becoming a comedian rather than a star of high tragedy. Mother would have floated like a butterball.

I flatter myself that I sank with a certain dignity, though I continued to flap my finger-fins industriously and even made some tiny swimming motions with my ghost-muscles, which worked a little now that gravity's clutch was slightly counterbalanced by my negative buoyancy. If I must die, let it be with a

minimum of panic. Besides, the grip of gravity on a freefall being tends to make him fatalistic — he is in the ubiquitous grip of a power greater far than himself. Soon, surely, I would be lying on the pool's bottom, nailed down almost as securely as I had been on the tessellated pavement above. Crawl then to the pool's side and climb out if there were cracks to climb by? I strongly doubted my oxygen supply would permit that, though I would make the attempt.



### In the Pool

As I sank I oddly noted a dozen or so scarlet threads rising from my chest. The broken glass had pocked me deeply indeed. Now was the time for barracudas, piranhas and small sharks (but Texans would surely use big ones) to come nosing up to the threads and then snap me to chunks, bits, and ribbons in a tumultuous swirl of chaotic water — that is, if this pool were filled with such carnivores, as Terran suspense fiction had assured me was the custom of all

evil millionaires, wealthy criminals and politicians.

What actually happened was worse. I got the impression a white whale had dived into the pool or a medium-size white submarine been launched into it. The crash of its entry deafened me. Sub-surface waves struck me. The water was vastly disordered. All the artistically curving scarlet threads vanished in a pink swish. Then a pale monster approached and glided under me. I awaited with minimal tranquility the half-turn of the white shark and the great bite of its razor teeth. Considering my slenderness, I would doubtless be cut in two. In any case, it would all be over swiftly, the books agreed. I would emit one horrific groaning scream and —

What actually happened was that arms embraced me, I felt a female form long as my own against my back, while powerful kicks swiftly propelled me to the surface.

As I emerged, I blew explosively, and gulped down great lungfuls of thick Terran air, which now seemed sweeter than the Sack's. One strong hand shifted to my armpit. The other cradled the back of my head. I faintly heard the kicks which were keeping us both afloat. My whole face and some of my chest were above water.

Then from behind me, in strangely muffled tones, Rachel Vachel said, "You okay, Captain Skull?"

"Yes," I replied, "but I can't hear you."

"Water in your ears. I'll fix that." Lips and a tongue expertly glued themselves to each of my ears in turn and sucked. Then, in a roar, "How's that?"

"Perfect, princess. You needn't shout," I replied. "And now, if it is possible, could you turn me over so that my chest and belly are not in direct sunlight?"

"Of course, but why?"

"So we can look into each other's eyes. There's another reason, but it's too complicated to explain."

By that time Rachel had me turned and was supporting

me with a hand under my chin. Framed by plastered-down silvery hair, her face was more beautiful than I'd recalled. Her skull was well-formed — she had the makings of a good Thin. She was grinning, as if in the highest spirits.

Whatever her motives for rescuing me — generous, sneaky or crazy — I suddenly felt so much gratitude and tender admiration that only poetry could express it. Accordingly I recited:

Rachel, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicean barks of  
yore,  
That gently, o'er a perfumed  
sea,  
The weary, wayworn wanderer  
bore  
To his own native shore.

"By courtesy of Edgar Poe," I added.

Where the sea-beasts, ranged all round,  
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground;  
Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,  
Dry their mail and bask in the brine;  
Where great whales come sailing by,  
Sail and sail, with unshut eye,  
Round the world for ever and aye.

—"The Forsaken Merman," by  
Matthew Arnold





"That's just plumb beautiful, Scully," she sighed, "even if this pool ain't perfumed."

"It is now, princess," I told her, looking deeply into her shining eyes.

"Oh what a courtier!" she exclaimed. Then, chuckling. "So you think of me as a bark, Scully — a great big clumsy ocean-going vessel?"

"You are an ocean-going goddess," I told her. "While I am surely a most grateful, weary, wayworn wan . . ."

A great wave of weakness washed over me, almost blacking out my vision. I heard Rachel calling faintly, as if from a great distance, "Gloryosky! — I forgot your pills. Is one of each color right?"

"Yes. Two browns," I managed to reply.

I felt her wet fingers place four pills on my tongue. I crushed them between my molars for swifter effect and downed them quickly with a half mouthful of pool.

When my vision cleared, she was still trying to close with one hand a small pink case tied round her neck by a pink ribbon. Her other hand was occupied supporting me. She got it shut, but not before I'd noted inside, besides the pills which she must have taken from my exo's check-plate, a small dialed box and a

half dozen or so of what seemed to be minitapes.

Referring to the last, I asked politely as we bobbed up and down, "Some of your manuscripts, princess?"

"Yes, she replied, "includin' Houston's *Afire* and *Storm Over El Paso*. Scully, you're a skunk. Or at least you were last night, when you told Daddy about my lingerie drawers. He bust 'em all up, lookin' for subversive literature, and would have found the secret drawer for sure, except I was gettin' undressed so fast he had to scuttle out. He likes me to hand him my clothes through a door open about six inches — before he locks it."

"But princess." I told her gravely, "you did me, my father, and my family a great wrong when you revealed to your father the secret of the Lost Crazy-Russian Pitchblende Mine and that I carried it on my person. Only a very odd circumstance prevented your father from getting hold of the map and claim when he searched and slashed up my sack suit."

"Scully, you're a numbskull!" she snapped at me. "Sorry I got to tell you this, but that map-claim business is pure dream. Bought from an Aleut who had it off a Cree Injun! Why, that's the oldest swindle

goin'. Scully, you got no more chance of making money out of that mining claim than you have of making time with La Cucaracha when I'm around. Last night I brought it up just as a red herring to distract Daddy and win back some favor with him. He'll believe anything, long as it means more money for him. Scully, you don't know the rudiments of high revolutionary intrigue."

"But princess," I began injuredly. Truly, I was shaken.

At that moment a shouting started at the poolside. Rachel turned my face so that I too could see Burleson, hands on knees yet still reeling a little, as he yelled overshoulder toward the gringo door.

"Hey, Governor! Come out if you can hear me. Come out arushing. Your honorable daughter's swimming bare-naked with that skin-and-bones revolutionary from outer space. He's bare-naked too!"

I was impressed by the relish with which Burleson reported to Lamar his daughter's misbehavior.

"Sure you don't need a little mouth-to-mouth resuscitation?" Rachel asked sportively. "You look peaked, you know. It'd make Bilious Burly boil, besides drivin' Lushy Lamar plumb loco if he gets here in time. Incident-

ally, I'm not quite bare naked, as those fat-guts insist on describing the highly civilized state of total nudity. I'm wearing my flesh-toned mini-underwear, which is all the clothes Daddy allowed me when he locked me up — unless you count the profusion of unshocked pink sheets I knotted together for my escape."

"Bussing would be beautiful, but — " I began.

She was already off again with, "Hey, is free fall a little like this? I guessed it! You'll show me the real thing some day, won't you, Scully? You know, I think Daddy's got a great big sex-thing going for me, maybe unconscious, but maybe not. Else why this eternal lockin' in bedrooms and takin' away all the clothes except a tease-minimum? You know how he's always pickin' off his coat and pants lint that ain't there? I bet those are snowflakes from the blizzard of puritanic guilt that's forever buffetin' him!"

"Excellent armchair analysis, princess," I agreed. "But should not we be doing something? Soon the houseboys will come running and then Rangers, I suppose, and between them they'll be able to figure out a way to capture us? Surely some of them besides yourself can swim. And is there not a cowboy waldo called a lasso? Have you your horse or

a swifter vehicle nearby? Then there may still be time for you to swim me to the shore away from Burleson and carry me — I am featherweight, you are strong — to that vehicle and — ”

“Hush up and stop frettin’, Scully,” she ordered gayly. “Everything’s under control and proceeding according to schedule. Now take houseboys. Not a one of them turned up this morning. That great speech of yours last night sure started a bully ruckus. El Toro says you are guilty of premature activism and romantical individualism, but he’s playing along. Jeepers, what I’d give for your actin’ skill! But you’ll teach me everything, darling, won’t you? Why, there’s rumors the remains of the late Austin’ Praetorian Guard are holed up in Greasertown. Hunty-Wunt’s having conceptions decidin’ whether to rush, besiege or atom-bomb. Hey, here come Daddy and Big Foot! Hi-yah, Lushy Lamar! Mornin’, Bilious Burly! Greetin’s Chinchy Chase! Come on in, all of you, the water’s fine. We’re havin’ *fun!*”

And with that she kissed me passionately until we had sunk at least three feet, whereupon with two powerful kicks she surfaced us again, and I was able to honor that kiss with the gasp it deserved.

“You swim here at once, sugar, you hear me?” Lamar was raving, tearing his hair with one hand and pointing at us with the other. “It’s a million bedroom-years I’m going to give you this time. And no clothes at all.”

“Why, Daddy, I’d think you’d be happy you’d left me those two scraps of panties and bra,” she called back sweetly. “For all you know, I may be wearin’ ’em now. That is, if you’re lucky. Tell me, Scully, have I got my pants on?”

As I groped for an answer which would be offensive to Lamar, yet still gallant, a large smooth metal hook settled around my neck. Rachel whipped it off barely in time. She shoved it away from us, then yanked it back. On the poolside, Sheriff Chase staggered and lost hold of the 10-meter pole on which the hook was mounted. It floated in the pool.

“Sugar, I’m beggin you,” Lamar called, on his knees now and wringing his hands. “Why, there hasn’t been a like scandal since Jefferson Davis, looking for a place to smoke and purely by accident, walked in on Portia Calpurnia Lamar while she was taking a spit-bath. Swim to your Daddy, sugar.”

Rachel called back, “Daddy, why don’t you buy yourself a townhouse of teen-age sportin’

gals? Come to terms with life, Governor."

"But that's not the same thing, sugar!"

During this interchange, three Rangers with laser rifles had come hurrying, as far as Texans ever do hurry, out of the gringo door. Chase conferred with them. One retrieved the pole and started around the pool with it. Chase took out of his pocket one of those black squeeze cylinders Hunt had been playing with yesterday, and he inspected it narrowly. Simultaneously Burleson drew from a holster at his side a revolver of ancient aspect and goggled at it somewhat wonderingly.

"Princess, we can't talk our way out of this, we must do something," I whispered urgently.

"Scully, I told you everything's on," she whispered loudly back. "but if it makes you feel any better — " She opened her pink purse one-handed and clicked a lever on the tiny box inside.

"Black Madonna calling Submarine. Come in, Submarine," she softly said to it, holding it close to her mouth and ear, all three just above water. I heard but could not distinguish the words of a reply. She continued, "Roger. Look here, me and La Muerta are pool-center and we're going to be in trouble in about 30 sec-

onds. You'll be here in 25? Swell!"

Clicking it off and shutting her purse, she whispered, "Antique crystal AM radio. Baffles the Rangers."

I did my best to feel encouraged. Did the pool connect with a river or underground lake? It sounded difficult. Still, the pool was deep. There was a big bang and something very solid splatted the water a foot from my head. Blast stung my skin. I saw Burleson leveling his smoking revolver toward me, swinging it in arcs of about twenty degrees.

Rachel trod water strongly and swung me around so she was between me and the gun. Meanwhile she yelped, "Daddy, you gonna let him kill me? You want your lovin' Rachel with holes in her, deader than the Laredo cowboy?"

Lamar sprang up and grappled with the mayor, who protested, "Just firing a shot across their bows, Governor, maybe pick off the sky-greaser. No harm meant your precious one."

Chase shouted, "Come out, Miss Lamar and tug La Cruz with you. No back-talk either — we've quit fooling. Boy, get ready to boil the water around them."

The laser rifles were leveled to either side of us. Their heat sure-

ly couldn't boil the whole pool. But maybe if the beams were kept close enough —

Rachel put my hands behind her neck and then embraced me. "Hold me tight, Scully," she said, treading water so that I faced away from the patio. Perhaps she meant us to die together. Little I could do.

The third Ranger was reaching the hook toward us. But before I could warn Rachel, he jerked it away in a wide circle as he turned.

Weaving its way toward us amongst the cryptic towers, was a menacing plume of brown dust. It grew larger and higher by seconds. I began to hear a roar.

"It's a twister! Run for your lives!" the ranger cried, dropping the hook and pounding back around the pool.

Rachel turned us so that I was the one facing the patio. My hands were clasped together behind her neck. My chin rested on her shoulder. I closed my teeth on my wrist to make sure my head stayed up. Even if Rachel my beloved decided to sink us, I was going to stay up as long as possible.

The roaring was louder, closer. The two other Rangers and Lamar were shouldering each other through the gringo door, with Burleson a couple of groggy steps behind, while the third Ranger

now was about to pass him.

Chase, still at the poolside, was pointing something. Then it was as if an invisible hand and pen had very swiftly drawn a narrowing black line from him to us. Its end struck Rachel's back below my clasped hands and I felt her muscles go slack, even as leaked electricity tingled through me, almost making me unclasp my hands.

As we started to sink because she was no longer treading water, and as Chase turned and lumbered after the others, the roar became deafening. The plume of dust hit the pool and became a fountain of white spray.

I had to suck in a big breath before it struck us. Amidst blasting spray we were tugged upward a few centimeters, then shoved underwater by a great hand of wind.

Rachel's positive buoyancy more than counterbalanced my negative, but as we began to rise we were again shoved under.

Coming up a second time we made it. I blew through my nostrils, gasped through my wrist-obstructed mouth.

The tornado had halted over the patio, unable to decide whether to enter the house, climb over it, or back out. It was still shooting up spray from the end

of the pool a few meters away.

"Scully, I'm paralyzed below the neck. Don't let go of me," Rachel gasped in my ear, her voice barely audible.

"Don't worry about that, my princess," I replied grimly, though my voice was much muffled by my wrist in my mouth. Let go of her? She was my float!

The tornado made decision three. Once more we were pushed under. When we came up for the third time, we were inside a weird, dim, tall igloo of spray. The tornado's eye, I told myself, doubtful if there were such a thing in Terran Nature.

The whole Nature theory lost ground when I saw, vanishing upward, my bent exoskeleton and slashed sack suit, both in the grip of some metal claws on the end of a line.

My hands shifted their grip from each other to Rachel's hair, in which they knotted themselves. Unclasping my jaws, I let my head fall back.

Directly above, through what might be a large circular hole in spray-dashed transparent plastic, a fierce copper-hued face, made fiercer by lines of red and white paint and black top-knot, was peering. Something snaked down and landed across my head and Rachel's. Unsmiling thin lips opened to command, "Grab on, palefaces! Must move now!"

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What had fallen was a rope with knots every quarter meter. I clenched my teeth on it, then crawled one hand out of Rachel's hair to clench the rope with that too.

The rope straightened as it began to lift me from the water by head and hand. With the other I gripped Rachel's unfortunately thick hair as strongly as I could.

As my body lifted from the water, I felt my neck stretching and hastily let loose my teeth. It had been a grand gesture, but I didn't want my spinal cord snapped. However, I told myself heroically, I would hang on with my hands to the rope and Rachel to the point of shoulder dislocation and beyond.

My head flopped and I was looking down. As I felt my shoulders begin to dislocate in stabs of pain, I saw Rachel come to and grab the rope herself strongly — with both hands and teeth also.

At that moment I had an utterly convincing premonition: some day she and I would be a great aerial or even freefall team.

We were swiftly drawn through the hole and found ourselves sprawled in a vehicle which mostly wasn't there.

By that I mean it was constructed chiefly of a clear plastic

with the same refractive index as Terran atmosphere. Here and there parts of it were visible — motors, a shaft, some rods and its crew of two.

They were the Amerind who had hoisted us and, sitting at a medley of metal and plastic controls, Guchu.

He grinned at us but spoke no word.

Beyond the plastic enclosing us, brown dust was pouring upward on all sides. Overhead, great swift-flashing invisible blades cut through it.

"It's a kack - CACC — Com-bo Air-Cushion and Copter," Rachel explained over the roar, crawling toward me.

Ruler-straight lightning bolts flashed through the dust, turning it all dark red.

Guchu chortled. I felt the vehicle sharply tilt and rise. We were free of the dust, though no more red lightning bolts came near us.

Rachel cradled my aching neck and my head, turning the latter so I could see how one of the big towers cut us off from Lamer's ranch and the laser rifles of the Rangers.

Guchu said, flashing teeth, "We ride in the tallboy rig-coverer's shadow until we're out of range."

The Amerind said, "No dead Indians, no dead black, no dead

palefaces. Good. Everything is going fine."

I looked around, somewhat listlessly. Even sight of my poor exo and sack suit didn't make me sad or mad. The last hour had been a very full one.

The sophistication of the vehicle clashed with the air of revolutionary simplicity and poverty I had encountered in the church and cemetery late last night.

"If it's a kack, why do you call it Submarine?" I asked Rachel and yawned.

"Because it ain't one," she answered. She was dabbing antiseptics and fixing adhesive bandages on my chest. "Nother red herring for the Rangers."

"And you're not Black Madonna, you're Mary Magdalene," I observed lazily.

"You hush up."

I noted, stamped in black letters on the plastic near me: ACIFICPAY ACKBLAY EPUBLICRAY.

Slowly and with some difficulty I translated that from Pig Latin to: Pacific Black Republic.

Oh well, I thought languidly, all revolutions are poorer than third political parties and must accept foreign financing and military aid.

Then I passed out, or simply went to sleep.



### Riding the Whirlwind

Once again I woke in the Sack, but this time my stay was shorter. Mother was cradling me in her plump arms against her pneumatic bosom. There was a rhythmic sharp tapping. Father must be throwing a set together a few hours before curtain-time. I pictured him slowly twisting in freefall, two plastic scantlings and a nail gripped in one hand, a nervous hammer in the other.

But then my nose was tickled by the acrid odor of hot metal.

Was Father spot-welding again? — against all safety regulations established by Circumluna for the Sack. Very likely. Father often broke regulations, but always for the sake of the theater and art, at least as he explained it. Then why the hammering? — which really was in a more deliberate rhythm than Father's.

Why ask questions? I wasn't hurting. And I was where I wanted to be. Stay shut-eyed. Sleep.

Along with the tapping, I heard Father's panting breath. Rhythmic gasps. Anxiety stirred. Father mustn't work so hard. He would die. (One of my earliest secret fears was that Father would soon die, he looked so

Ho for Texas\*, land that restores us  
When houses choke us, and great books bore us!  
"The Santa Fe Trail," by Vachel  
Lindsay (\*Kansas in the original,  
but changed to Texas when the  
de facto annexation of Kansas  
by Texas was made public)





much like a skeleton. That was before I understood about Thins, Fats and Muscles.)

The imagined scene altered, dropping back ten thousand years or more. We were a cave family at home. I could feel against my chin and cheek the coarse fur of the bear's hide Mother wore. The hoarse breath was that of a dragon snuffing outside the cave. At a tiny hot fire, Father was forging the copper sword with which he would slay the dragon.

I opened my eyes. The last vision was closer to truth. I lay in a cave with stubby round spears of rock pointing down. I was softly cushioned against gravity, my head propped up. Long-haired fur covered me to my chin.

Across from me, an Indian sat behind a small walled fire, the heat of which I could feel. Wraithlike flames rose from the small red bed whenever I heard the snuffing. It was a bellows, worked by his knee.

Across the open furnace lay a femur of my exoskeleton, its cables removed. It glowed red in the middle, where the bend was. The bend was not as great as I recalled.

Pads shielding his palms, the Indian lay the femur across an anvil began straightening the exo-bone further with taps of a tiny-headed sledge.

The femur was still attached to the rest of the exoskeleton. The other bends had all been straightened. The metal where they had been was discolored. The ribcage was gone. The shallow dents were still in my headbasket.

The Indian was not the one who had been in the kack. This one's hair was silvery, his face a mass of wrinkles. Out of them, his black eyes watched me as he hammered. Nearby were piled my three cushion-cases. That pleased me.

The red in my femur faded, but the bend was gone. The Indian pointed his sledge at me.

He said, "I have learned one thing, Death. Without your armor, you are very weak. I have always suspected that."

I smiled at him and nodded a forefinger. I did not think he would note the latter, but his eyes shifted to it. Perhaps my hand lay outside the buffalo robe covering me.

I also later learned that what pillowed me so softly, with some effect of freefall, were three eider-down mattresses. I bless those gravity-conquering birds who think so much of their young that they line their nests with down which they pluck from their breasts and which man steals.

I felt thirsty and hungry. As

if the mere feeling were a cue, Rachel Vachel and La Cucaracha walked smiling into view, the hand of the former resting lightly on the shoulder of the latter. They both looked lovely in the red glow. Rachel had on her Black Madonna garb, while La Cucaracha wore a flaming red dress with belt and necklace of hammered silver plates. She walked proudly. Rachel had to dodge the stalactites with her head.

Without a word, Rachel drew down my buffalo robe and began to inspect my wounded chest, dripping on antiseptic here, renewing a bandage there. While La Cucaracha, using a corner of the furnace for stove, began to make a gruel of water and my protein food-pellets.

After getting a sip of water, I told the Mexo-Tex girl I liked to chew the pellets dry. She allowed me to do so with a couple.

While the good food worked in me, I marveled lazily at the amity of the dear girls. Last time they had been battling for me like wolf against musk-ox. Now they had made a truce. I wondered what that portended for me.

El Toro had entered and was standing before me, a hard grin on his swarthy face.

"How do you feel, comrade?" he asked.

"Very much better," I told him.

"*Bueno!*" he said with a nod like a gavel rapping a speaker's rostrum. "Very good indeed. You shall begin your work for the revolution tomorrow with an appearance at Tulsa."

"It will take longer than that, comrade," I informed him in my harshest base. I mustn't let these little Marxists think they owned me. "Your metal-working comrades have done a passable job straightening my bones, as far as I can see. But I personally — with the Indian's help in holding and handling, of course — must rewind my cables, adjust their tension and test every motor, lead and part."

"Not so!" he snapped at me and crooked a finger. There strode into view, yawning and rubbing sleep from his eyes, none other than Professor Fanninowicz. He bumped his head on a stalactite and cursed, "*Donnerwetter!*"

El Toro said proudly, "We had kidnapped him even before we rescued you from the pool. It is he who supervised repairs to your skeleton. He worked through the night and into the afternoon. Three hours ago we permitted him to rest."

"Forced me to, you mean, you lazy and undisciplined sub-man!" Fanninowicz barked at him. He

screwed a monocle into his right eye and standing very erect after a quick glance overhead, surveyed us all contemptuously.

"Understand, please," he said curtly, "that I detest you all and your ignorant, sentimental revolution. When the Lone Star Republic, vessel of noblest fascism, arrests you, as is inevitable, I shall smile at your punishments and hope they will be of the harshest. If death, then only after torture!"

"Why, Fanny," Rachel said under her breath, in hurt tones.

Ignoring her, he aimed his glare at me. "And that goes for you too, you miserable mummer from the slums of space!"

Then he relaxed, lost height, and with a shrug that was surely only unconsciously Jewish, he smiling said to me, "However, I am hopelessly enamored of your peerless exoskeleton. It is monomania, an *idée fixe* against which even my sternest military compulsions and compunctions are powerless. Within twelve hours your exoskeleton will be in finer shape than when you received it from those Russo-American swine, the technicians of Circumluna."

I had a great many doubts and reservations about that, but I did not voice them. El Toro, Kookie, Rachel and even the old Indian were simply too happily

self-satisfied and too infatuated with their revolutionary cunning in having used Fanninowicz's monomania against him.

Next day we skittered for Tulsa, Oklahoma, Texas, in three kacks taking different routes. We flew under and through low clouds shot with lightning, navigating in part by an echo device called radar, which was new to me since there are neither swarms of water-droplets nor starless times in space.

The kack's transparency made it seem as if we were swimming through a gray ocean. At any rate, the dank, dingy super-soup with its electrical seasoning was not to my taste. But it cheered my comrades because, they said, it disordered communications and hid us from Lone Star vulture-planes.

El Toro told me, with mixed pride and envy, that Texas newsmen have dubbed me The Specter and that I have been declared Public Enemy Number One of the Republic. The Rangers have sworn to nail my hide to a barn door, which I hope is hypothetical, alongside those of Clyde and Bonnie, whoever they be or have been. The search for us has become hot, El Toro affirmed, with both Hunt and Chase living up to their names.

"They going to burn you if they can, Sky Boy," Guchu assured me from the pilot's pad. "But have no fear. Death by fire is purifying."

Fanninowicz was not aboard our kack, which was a relief — the German is an insufferable combination of martinet (of me) and high priest (of my exo). But neither were Rachel and Kookie, which I found depressing — and determined to remedy, if we lived that long.

I put in time talking with a gray-topped much-bent Mex named Pedro Ramirez, who had been in a cyborged work-gang for twenty years. He pulled his shirt off his knobby shoulder to show me the puckered scars where deep-probing tubes had once fed tranquilizers, energizers and hormones from his yoke into artery and vein. He also insisted I inspect the curious callosities in his ears, made by the command plugs which had been housed there daily for two decades. Meantime he began softly to hum, I think without realizing it, a medley of monstrous tunes, and I once caught the curious English words:

"Every day, two hours times twelve,  
A million yokemen dig and delve."

But when I questioned him about the details of his gang-  
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work, he became excited and emotional. I easily quieted him with a few calm and confident suggestions.

I concluded that cyborging involves no direct control of the nervous system, but is merely a means of chemical and hypnotic supervision, the command plugs transmitting both an audio background of tranquilizing propaganda and also the orders of a Texan overseer observing the work site directly or by 3D.

Or the orders, El Toro told me, of a cyborged Mex strawboss, in turn overseen by a Texan, who in this fashion control as many as a dozen work-gangs.

It struck me as a vastly over-complicated as well as degrading system for work more easily done by machines, or for that matter by uncyborged workers energized by coca leaves and tranquilized by marijuana. I decided the Texans favored it because it allowed them to keep the Mexicans uneducated and, probably more to the point, catered to the Texan conviction that Mexicans and other "primitives" are ineducable.

"And those pitiful peones don't even know the work they do, Esquel," El Toro topped my guesses. "They get powerful hypnotic commands to forget, when the yoke is off, the de-

tails and even nature of all labor they perform while cyborged."

"Hyper-security, man," Guchiu nodded. "Surer than cuttin' out the tongue and poppin' the eye. A blind mute can gesture and draw and maybe write, but nobody can tell what he's forgot."

I realized this was why my questions had disturbed Pedro Ramirez. Nevertheless, after administering soothing suggestions, I asked if he had done work within the outsize oil-rig towers.

"Never in *those*, *Senor Espectro!*" he assured me with a shuddering, wide-eyed headshake. "No, never once!"

His denial struck me as too strong to be true — especially along with the "dig and delve" drone — but I had no desire to torment further in order to satisfy idle curiosity. So I calmed him once more and shortly had him asleep, suggesting that he wake feeling well and happy. A leading actor who is not a passable hypnotist is hardly worth his salt.

It occurred to me, as the trip grew long and I began to ache in my exo, that it would be pleasant if there were someone to hyp me asleep. Somehow I did not want to do a self-hyp. I recalled wistfully the tender nursing I had got from Rachel and La Cucaracha in the cave. I had loved them as co-mothers then, nurses

within gravity's womb. But now I reminded myself, slapping the rib-cage of my trusty exo, that I loved them in quite a different fashion. The thought heartened me greatly.

My rib-cage was a new one, made of solid silver, weighing a few pounds more, but with a lovely dull shimmer. Its luxury contrasted nicely with my martial headbasket, the dents in which had only imperfectly been beaten out.

But by the time we reached the central square of the Tulsa greasertown, my mood was once more as low and dark as the weather continued to be. The girls' brief greetings raised it a bit, but it immediately dropped to a new low when El Toro whispered, "Just keep in mind, *camarado*, that thirteen known informers have had their throats slit or been otherwise taken care of, to safeguard tonight's gathering against interruption."

It seemed a dismally high price for a performance — there'd been nothing about murder in my contract — and I feared I'd be a flop. Up to my entrance, I kept seeing those gaping gullets and also the pitiful bent-backs who had died at Dallas, inflamed by my rantings. While the lighting of electric whips and laser beams framed my thoughts.

But as soon as I faced my audience I was in a controlled revolutionary frenzy, sardonic and heartless as only Death can be. It's a perpetual miracle how a part takes hold and carries one, even when one actively dislikes the role.

I was afraid too that Fanninowicz had booby-trapped my exoskeleton, perhaps by time-bomb, but it actually continued to operate more smoothly than ever. What strange and contradictory compulsions fire men!

At the end of my oration I was so worked up that I wanted to lead the mob into Tulsa's texastown to commit acts of violence. But locals did that, and I took off with El Toro and the rest for the abandoned atomic shelter that would be our camp until we headed for Little Rock, Wichita or Springfield, Missouri, as tactics dictated.

I wondered at an atomic shelter being deserted in a world that had endured one nuclear war and now seemed minimally peaceful, but El Toro explained to me that radioactives were everywhere in such short supply, due to their military and industrial use, that they would no more be used again as major weapons than the last natural gasoline would have been used for molotov cocktails.

To my surprise, Fanninowicz

haughtily confirmed El Toro's explanation, though with a curse for a world that had lost with Germany the industry and patience to mine and smelt low-grade uranium ores — and also with a final sardonic smile that lingered in my memory.

I pointed out that a small atomic bomb had been expended on Austin's praetorian guard.

"A few tacticals left, yes," El Toro agreed. "Museum pieces, one might say. Texans are loco."

"Your figures on the radioactives shortage are right, Tor," Guchu said, "but you get the wrong analogy. "Last native gas wasn't used to run a motor, but to fry a black." He paused. "Or maybe whitey. Who knows?"

He landed our kack in a drizzle where I saw only one darkness instead of earth and air. Then he turned toward me and said, "Real reason no earthling — except a few locos with bloated egos — would risk more fallout is that we all know we still got a little death ticking in our bones from the Big Poison War. Even you're getting a little of that death into you, Mister Death, every day you stay here. No, Tor, we got to have confrontation. That's the trouble with you Mexes — always being gracious to people, to whitey even, and smoothing things out — combo, I guess, of the old hidalgo

dream and your Indian ability to take anything that's handed to you and endure it, like your yokes, without striking back except for an occasional knife in the dark.

"No, we got to tell Mr. Death here the truth. Such as the real reason A-shelters are taboo. One, a lot of them got worse poisoned from fallout than the toplands — through ground water and kinked ventilation systems, and because who hits low gets hit low back. Now don't get edgy about that, Sky Boy — any cobalt-90 in this shelter has been ticking a hundred years. Two, whitey thinks the shelters have got hants in them and he's scared, though he won't admit it."

Ghosts I could laugh at, and did. Before we entered the shelter I peered vainly for the moon. El Toro asked with a sympathy that surprised me whether I was homesick. I replied with minimal untruth that, no, I just wanted to know the date — I was uncertain how long I had been in the cave.

"It is the 27th of Alamo, Esquel," he told me. "Come down now."

I decided that the Texan calendar would have to do for me for my stay on Terra, or until I glimpsed Luna once more.

Ghosts did not seem so laughable when I was in the huge and shadowy shelter, where our camp was dwarfed and faint echoes returned from black unexplored corridors. But I saw no cracks or other bomb-damage. Tulsa, I reminded myself, had lain inside the Texas Bunker. Dinner cheered me further; and during it, while still stirred with after-show excitement, I began with La Cucaracha a discussion of history which we carried into the curtailed space I thought of as my star dressing room.

It turned out that she has a bright hard head on that exciting little athletic body. She pointed out rather bitterly that a Mexotex female is the lowest of the low and must have ten times the brains of a man to get anywhere.

She insisted that most of the Texas history Elmo had fed me was pure Texas brag, though she did admit that back at the time of the annexation in 1845 Sam Houston had cowed Washington with the prediction that if Texas weren't admitted to the Union on generous terms — such as permission to divide into five states with ten senators whenever desired — then Texas would engulf all the West to the Pacific and assume leadership of the southern states when the inevitable break over slavery came.

"No *Esqueleto amado*, in veri-

ty it was like this: the wealthy gringo junta which arranged the removal of President Kennedy soon became the entire heart of the Texas Establishment. Thereafter things happened much as you've been told. The blacks, reckless and inspired as their Zulu and Madhi progenitors, carved out their countries to southeast and southwest during the disorders following the Atomic war. We forgotten Mexes, fiery but incurably fatalistic, indolent yet good workers and breeders, remained the undercats and grew into the new servile class."

I asked her what had happened to Elmo. She said she had no idea, but that he was resourceful and shrewd under his blather, and whatever happened would land on his feet. I agreed he had big ones. She admitted she had an affection for the man despite, or perhaps because of the genially bullying ways. This led me to inquiring indirectly whether she wasn't now lonely.

I was on the point of making time with her when, with consummate disregard of privacy, Rachel Vachel wandered in. I expected another bruhaha, but the Black Madonna appeared not to note that Kookie and I were moving toward intimacies. Shortly the two girls departed, leaving me aroused and frustrated. I damned them heartily, summon-

ed El Toro to help me out of my exo, refused to see Fanninowicz, downed a pill and slept.

Our next revolutionary gathering was on Alamo 29th at Wichita, Kansas, Texas, a city much like Dallas or Tulsa, except I began to note scars of the Atomic War and also short Texans — poor whites and northerners not given the hormones.

El Toro kept me unpleasantly aware of the price being paid for my performances by telling me about the diversionary riots being staged in Little Rock and Colorado Springs to keep the Rangers' attention off Wichita. He also informed me that I am creating a panic across Texas. Not only is the Mex World in a fever of excitement at the coming of El Esqueleto, but the Tall World has got the jitters. There have been rumors and reports of the dread skeleton-man everywhere. I was simultaneously leading mobs in Denver and Corpus Christi. Twenty minutes later I was captured in Memphis. Meanwhile I was seen grinning horrendously down from a copter that buzzed the streets of El Paso. Et cetera.

I was flattered yet unimpressed. I asked El Toro how the revolution we've stirred up is going in the south. I got evasive answers.



I told myself not to think about that, but to remember I am Christopher Crockett La Cruz, touring Texas with the Revolutionary Ramblers on a physiologically limited engagement. No joke about that last — I was suffering from digestive disorders, while gravity became a deadly drag despite my exo and eiderdowns. I insisted on a warm bath at last, with a support-net to keep me from sinking. Little relief. Could I be provided with a tub of heavy water? That might float me. I was laughed at, especially by Rachel, who said I had more expensive notions than Daddy.

"Nevertheless she and I had a cozy chat together, which again turned toward history. In different ways we both became nostalgic about the vanished U.S.A., the industrial and scientific inspiration it gave the world, and its truly great men — Franklin, Jefferson, Houston, Poe, Lincoln, Edwin Booth, Ingersoll, David Griffith, Roosevelt Two (though she like Elmo thought him a figurehead), Dr. King, and so on.

**I**t had been an ideal country for men with grand imaginations, for geographical and industrial pioneers — until they turned the grandeur to grandiosity and began to broadcast it over the newly discovered mass me-

dia. We grieved at that robust and shrewd land's fatal weakness for making right, then wrong decisions, and standing by the latter beyond all reason and with puritanic perversity. The Civil War, which freed the slaves, and the deals of the 1870's, which again crushed the blacks, recreating tensions and problems which had to be solved with violence a hundred years later. The Great Experiment of prohibiting alcoholic beverages, which nurtured America's wealthy criminal class and allowed it to entrench itself. The later hysterical agitation against marijuana, with exactly the same results. (I was surprised to discover from Rachel how much, according to her thinking, Texas's sly legalization of weed, a Mex smoke to start with, helped lead Texas to her primacy among the states and also her domination of Latin Americans.) The First World War, followed by isolationism and repudiation of the League of Nations. The brief dream of a monopoly of atomic power, followed by unending nightmares. The Long Adventure in Indo-China with its tragic consequences for all Terra.

A nation nurtured on cowboy tales and the illusion of eternal righteousness, perpetual victory.

A nation that sought to create, simultaneously, in the same people, a glutton's greed for food,

comfort and possessions — and a puritanic morality. Merciless competition — and docile co-operation. Timid safety mindedness — and reckless self-sacrifice. A hard-boiled but docile young. Worship of success so long as it could be thought due to luck — and hatred of outstandingness granted by nature and/or hard work. Great scientists and scholars — and a contempt for same. The welfare state — and entrenched wealth. The brotherhood of man and racial discrimination. In short, nul program. Order, counterorder, disorder. No wonder even Texas made more sense than that.

Rachel told me that Kookie's views of the Texas Establishment were much oversimplified, but admitted her father's power was derived ultimately from the Texan Cabal, which dominated American policies from the middle of the twentieth century.

She laughingly revealed she had no notion whatever as to whether she and her father were actually related by blood to the second president of the Lone Star Republic. Likely Lamar had been a political name taken by one of her most recent ancestors. That had become a custom during the bloody years after the Atomic War, when Texas conquered — for its own good! — most of the bomb-shattered and

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fallout-diseased U.S.A. and also Mexico, Central America and Canada, finally establishing the atom-scarred Stikine and Mackenzie Mountains as the Russo-Texan boundary.

I pointed out to the Black Madonna that she and Captain Skull proved by their sentimentalizing over the U.S.A. that they were both hopeless romantics, addicted to lost causes. She liked that, and I was getting primal places with her, when Kookie popped into my supposedly private room in the deserted country mental hospital, no longer approachable by wheeled vehicles, where our company was bivouacking.

Once again there was no fracas whatever, no observable hard feelings. Once again the girls tripped off together. And once again I was left tense and uncatharsized. I decided to give up women. At least on Terra. And certainly for that night!

On Alamo 30th the weather stayed overcast. Likewise my spirits. We played Topeka. It was a re-run of Wichita. Outside of myself, the performance was strictly amateur. I rewrote the script, giving Kookie and Rachel brief appearances. Thumbs were turned down on my innovations by El Toro, Guchiu, F. Francisco. Latins and Indians re-

sent women getting the spotlight, ~~they said~~. The committee was also shocked by my suggestion that I wear my blond wig for variety.

Later El Toro approached me privately about elocution lessons. I agreed to give him same, in strict secrecy — a far as his bull voice permitted. At least I might be able to get him to cut down on the muscle-show.

I decided R. V. and La C. had entered into some private agreement about me. I played it very cool with them. No more tete-a-tetes. I couldn't stand another interruption.

For that matter, I would have found it difficult to be private with a woman if I had desired. Fanninowicz was forever at my heels, wanting to test my exo, check batteries, increase power, try out new wirings — his concern and new ideas were limitless. I felt like Frankenstein's monster pursued by Thomas Edison. I decided Germans are maniacs.

Yet El Toro insisted I humor the Beady-Eyed Bavarian as much as possible. And truly my exo was kept perfectly tuned.

But my physical condition was deteriorating, though I mentioned this to no one. No stiff upper lip, just didn't want to be fussed over. The Monocled Monster might have announced he is doctor of flesh-medicine also.

I kept reminding myself that my only real aim was (1) get to Yellowknife; (2) check and double-check on the Lost Crazy-Russian Pitchblende Mine, despite Rachel's damnably plausible discouragements; (3) put the bite on the committee and use my Circumlunan passport to hightail it for the Sack on the first ship available.

Rachel asked me why worry about the mine, since it had been clearly proved I don't have the claim with me, either in my baggage or on my person. I wondered if I should tell her the truth. Concluded: Definitely not!

At Kansas City, Kansas, Texas, on Spindletop 1st, El Toro decided I needed a holiday. He took me and La Cucaracha to a bullfight at the stadium of the former Wyandotte High School. I was disguised by a big hat, big boots, padded suit over my exo and vast blond mustache over cheekplates. El Toro and Kookie were servants. We got by. My ability to pass as a Texan, at least under casual inspection, struck me as something which might prove useful.

The bullfight was delightful. They used hormonized bulls, huge and slow, true "cathedrals," while the matadors were young Mexes, male and female, who dodged the bull acrobatically and even did

knee-swings and giant swings on horns. Like ancient Crete.

Kookie told me she had trained as a bullfighter, then decided life as a "sociable secretary" provided greater financial satisfactions, and revolutionary work greater emotional ones, while acrobatics were useful in both activities. This with a hearty wink. I remembered in time not to start flirting with her. "Play it cool, even cold," is the motto of *La Muerta Alta*, I told myself. What did I need with women?

Besides, if I held out, one of them would be sure to give in.

Our revolutionary gathering at night was in the huge and straggling greasertown along the river in Kansas City, Missouri, Texas. The greatest stockyards in the world, I was told, before it had taken a direct nuclear hit. Decades later, when radioactivity had dropped to a tolerable level, the Mexes had slowly built their way into it, partly forced by local population pressure and partly spontaneously, with the residual radioactivity providing some assurance that their masters would stay out, or at least cut their visits short.

I felt nervy from the start. Our stage was in front of a riverside warehouse with thick brick walls, which above the second floor had been melted into a  
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hillocky glazed dome from which there still thrust the huge, twisted, rust-brown fingers of old steel beams.

Underfoot was a swept, randomly crackled, greenish and brownish tessellation of fused soil, its fissures filled with new dirt.

Around this rough nuclear plaza, in front of the shacks they dwelt in, our audience began to gather silently — intent sallow and brown faces with a large scattering of darker ones: "stay behind" blacks who were incurably rooted here or at any rate hadn't yet made it to Pacific Republic or Florida Democracy.

But it was hard to make out even faces. Our stage lighting was dim, despite the continuing overcast.

I was standing with the rest of the company in the dark inside the warehouse, back from its central doorway.

A few minutes before "curtain time" there was a commotion as a gang of locals set up a wide-spaced lattice of narrow black rods in front of and over our stage, making it even smaller. No one could or would explain to me why, El Toro being away at the moment. It seemed theatrical insanity, further spoiling the audience's view of the actors and making them feel like beasts in a cage. At least I felt like one.

I fumed impotently, knowing that my comrades had little or no idea of what makes good theater. I scented trouble. I grew nervier. I wished the girls weren't there, but felt unable to talk to either of them.

And then a minute before my entrance, running over my opening lines in my head, I drew a blank. It was as if I had forgotten Spanish and English both, and probably Russian too.

Instead a wordless sight slid across my mind, wiping out all other reality. I was in the same huge room. It was filled with white light, so there was not a shadow. Files of beasts lumbered into it. Men with unconcerned faces but spattered robes struck the horned heads with great mallets, adroitly cut the sleek-furred throats (each man had his one monotonous job), flayed off the hides, dismembered and disembowled the carcasses. My ears were filled with hoof-clumpings and great thuddings, with bestial grunt and screams. My nostrils were likewise crammed with the stench of frightened animals, their copious excrement and the floods of their rich, sweet blood. Other men with unconcerned faces constantly hosed the killing floor.

What startled me most was that the spurting, streaming, flooding, omnipresent blood was

not a darkish crimson, as I had always thought of blood in quantity (something I had never seen), but a phosphorescent carmine just off fuchsia, suggestive of tropical blooms and lipstick and giddy body-paint.

Then I was being nudged in the side, not gently, and the vision shot aside. La Cucaracha was reminding me that my entrance cue had been spoken.

I strode on stage in a near trance, my entrance-applause a distant soft thudding no louder than the beat of blood in my ears.

I had always tested negative for psi in the Sack. But now I wondered how imagination alone could have created so vivid a vision of a slaughter house.

Someone else than I said, "*Yo soy la Muerta*," and for at least the first five minutes I felt like a beetle lodged behind the visor of an animated and vocal suit of armor.

Then either the slaughter-house vision lost its power, or else I grew big enough to take over the role of Death the Universal.

The laughs I got were few and low, the cheers low too but gutsy. I think I never held an audience so well before. In fact, I did too well. I must have hypnotized the lookouts and my own comrades, for as I came to the

finger-shaking bit and "we must risk death and if necessary deal death," I believe I was the first one to hear the faint rushes of air and soft drones overhead, and glance cautiously up and in one snapshot look see poised above us six copters with antennas and coils and searchlights and other electronic items where landing gear should be.

Then, but not before my eyes were slits, the plaza was flooded with hot raw white light.

There was time for each member of the audience to spring up, to take one look or one step.

Then I felt the faintest tingling and numbing in my flesh.

At the same instant each member of the audience froze like a statue, paralyzed in posture and expression.

About a third of them, off balance at the moment, tumbled down, but without an iota of change in the look of the face or the contortion, however grotesque, of the body.

I shot a glance over my shoulder, noting that my actions were slowed down a trifle.

My comrades were moving about in a slow motion, as if running through invisible water. Guchu was making toward me, where I stood stage-front. The others were headed for the warehouse doorway, or already through it.

A SPECTER IS HAUNTING TEXAS

I looked back at the audience and, utterly fascinated, began to scan their faces one by one. Being an actor, expression is a mania with me.

Here and now I found great confirmation for Leonardo's dictum that the grimaces of agony and ecstasy are almost indistinguishable, though I noted many an interesting trace of surprise, fear and rage.

In their statuesque totality, the mob was a greater work of art than Murray's "Slaves of Gravity," where 793 tiny figures are depicted struggling waist, shoulder, neck, or mouth deep from a curving surface of moon marble, which might be a section of Luna herself.

It occurred to me that the crowd constituted a semi-accidental work of art which could be titled with apt ambiguity "Field Slaves," for now that I saw Rangers dropping from the copters on spinning shoulder vanes and also charging into the plaza afoot, all of them clad in over-suits of copper netting, I realized that the copters' electronic gear was projecting a paralysis field from which my comrades were protected in part by the copper or other metal cores in the black-painted bars around us, but I altogether by the secondary Faraday cage of my precious exoskeleton.

The Rangers, who also wore owl-eyed black gasmasks, were a superb sight in themselves: black giants who were a tessellation of small ebon diamonds mortised with gold. ‘

Guchu’s upstretched fingers slowly clamped on my elbow and dragged on it.

“Come on, Scully,” he gasped effortfully. “Make that effort, man. You can do it.”

“Certainly,” I agreed, turning swiftly. I was greatly irritated to be jerked from my supreme artistic reverie — Death Contemplates His Victims — but realized the black had a point: an emergency was certainly developing. So I forced myself to use the most courteous tones as I asked, “But do what?”

“Beat it through the warehouse, you dumb ofay,” he exclaimed with such an attempt at vociferousness and speed — and rage at the readiness with which I moved — that he slumped on my arm and the last three words came on the in-gasp.

Since his rebuke was instantly provided with the multiple exclamation point of many objects clattering on the roof of our cage and several dropping through, I realized that Guchu had been altogether right and my attempt to be a crisis-observer wrong as always. (Yet it had been so fascinating!)

Instinctively we both took deep breaths. Then utter inky blackness exploded rather than flowed from the cannisters, one of which had fallen at our feet.

I took one sight on the door into the warehouse. Then, since the erupting blackness prickled me through my sack suit, I instantly closed tight my eyes, mouth and nostrils, clamping the latter together with finger and thumb, while my other hand gripped Guchu as I made giant strides toward my target.

My face and hands prickled and stung, but not enough to incapacitate me.

Another object thudded in the dark somewhere near us and began to say self-importantly, “I am a 60-second bomb. Fifty-nine. Fifty-eight. Fifty-seven. Fifty —”

“And I’m a 90-year man, bomb, with decades to go!” Guchu answered the thing — and paid for his rash defiance with a horrendous coughing fit.

I continued to make tracks. Fortunately, my elocutionary activities have given me a lung capacity unusual in Circumhuna — something which had also helped me in Governor (or would it now be President?) Lamar’s patio pool.

When counting strides told me I was well inside the warehouse, I swabbed my eyelids with

GALAXY

water from my cheek-plate and risked another quick sighting.

We were almost out of the smoke. From a trap door five long strides away, La Cucaracha waved us on, her eyes streaming, her other hand shutting her mouth and nose.

I made the trap door, my eyes stinging, and flickered a downward glance.

There was a round well five meters deep, with ladder rungs embedded in one side and with Father Francisco peering anxiously up from the bottom.

La Cucaracha scuttled down. I got Guchu's feet and hands on the rungs—he was blind and retching from the gas—and followed him as swiftly as I could.

Kookie called, "Close the trap!"

As I reached up, a incandescently scarlet laser beam missed my hand, spattered against and was also reflected downward from the trap's metal in-face. I felt heat between thigh and right knee, and that leg went limp. I heard Father Francisco gasp hissing with pain.

I shut and bolted the trap, then made it down on arms alone. Then I was hopping along a corridor I had to crouch in, supported to either side by Kookie and the padre.

There was an explosion that shook the floor.

A SPECTER IS HAUNTING TEXAS

Behind us Guchu gasped out, "Bomb weren't bluffin', anyhow. I hate a liar," and managed a croaking laugh.

I wondered if he knew what bomb he was talking about.

Around that time I discovered my right leg was useless because one of the femur-cables had been melted through. The two ends dangled and jigged.

I also noted that the reflected laser beam had creased Father Francisco's arm. The wound would have bled, but the beam's heat had cauterized it.

Then I was being helped to crawl through a circular port. I found myself sprawled in semi-dark among my comrades in a flattened cylinder. Someone had closed the port and was locking it with a wheel.

Opposite the port was a window into darkness. Then a great white snout peered in with unwinking eyes and with long white feelers around its jaws.

The cylinder began to rock and to move in surges.

Shortly later I was told that we were in a river submarine—called "Airplane," of course, with consummate revolutionary duplicity—and that the white monster had been a mutated and haploid catfish.

We rode the currents of the  
Kansas and Missouri for



weary hours without incident except for a few bottom-scrappings and glimpses of exotic river life. On his insistence, I told El Toro about the government of Circumluna. He expressed horror at what he dubbed "Sackabondage" and insisted I carry the revolution there. As soon as I had made him understand vacuum and decomposition, he saw endless possibilities in bombs artfully placed. I let him elaborate his nonsense and rested my eyes on Rachel Vachel and La Cucaracha sleeping in each other's arms. I decided that if I escaped alive from this mortal Terran bruhaha and were able to carry anything back to the Sack, it would be something very different from revolution — unless one considers all females conspirators and destructors by nature.

We landed at dawn at a swamp-circled hideout short of Missouri City. Fanninowicz was one of the few awake and on hand to observe our limping and dispirited arrival.

"Ho-ho!" he mocked. "I see you have had a brush with the Rangers! Next time — *Kaaaaah!*" And while making this nasty noise at the back of his tongue, he drew his thumb across his throat. "And as for you, you *Schafskopf*, you bummer, you are no fit to be trusted with your exoskeleton than a child with a computer!"

"That's how the Circumlunans teach their children math," I told him as I hopped along. "Splice my cable now, you Texo-Prussian paranoid!"

## TO BE CONCLUDED

### This Month in IF—

#### LAST DREAMER

A "Rim Worlds" Novelette

by A. Bertram Chandler

#### SONG OF THE BLUE BABOON

by Roger Zelazny

#### ROGUE STAR

by Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson

Don't miss the big August issue of IF — twice awarded the "Hugo" as the world's best-liked science-fiction magazine!

**for  
your  
information**



**BY WILLY LEY**

## In Australia, the Rain...

**I**n Australia the rain doesn't fall on the plain — unfortunately for Australians it does not fall much anywhere. The paradox of the two southern continents, Australia and Antarctica, is that Australia is the driest of all continents, while Antarctica is the wettest, though this does not show too clearly because all the water is in its solid state.

The general dryness of Australia can be read off any general map by the simple trick of looking for cities. Where there are cities, there is water; where there is no water there are no cities. A glance at a general map shows that the Australian east coast must be the wettest area, and a specialized map (Fig. 1) confirms this conclusion. Only a small percentage of the continent has what we consider normal rainfall; another small percentage has enough to make do, the largest part definitely does not have enough rain. One can even add: if any.

Only a century ago the conclusion would have been that these are the facts and that one has to be grateful that they are not worse. Nowadays the attitude, once such a set of facts has been established, is to ask: "what can we do about it?" Several decades ago a British visitor to Australia learned about the general lack of rain and while on shipboard, during the voyage home, he borrowed what maps of Australia there happened to be in the chartroom, brooded over them and when he landed in Southampton he announced that he had the solution. All it would take, he said, is a few thousand tons of dynamite to blast a gap in the mountain chains along the Australian west coast. Then the winds bearing

moist air from the Indian Ocean could blow through this gap and would bring rain to the great deserts of central Australia, making them fertile.

It sounded simple; as a matter of fact it was too simple, not to say simple-minded. The undertaking of blasting a sufficiently big gap would be a bit too much even for our technology, which has advanced considerably since the proposal was made. Moreover, it would not work because the air currents are not what the ingenuous traveler hoped they would be.

I assume that the helpful visitor informed the Australian government authorities what they should do with their continent. The au-



Fig. 1. Map of Rainfall over Australia.

The average annual precipitation is given in inches. Nearly half of the continent has less than 10 inches of rain per year; more than half has less than 20 inches.

thorities probably wrote a polite reply; they may or may not have mentioned that they were considering another scheme, much less ambitious to be sure, but feasible and with the assurance of success. It was what is named the Snowy Mountains Scheme, the Snowy Mountains being a section of a long mountain chain that in Australia is called the Great Dividing Range; outside Australia it is usually referred to as the Australian Alps.

The mountains begin near the western boundary of Victoria and more or less follow the coastline, though some distance inland. The whole range has the shape of a quarter of a circle; the northern end of the range is roughly to the west of Sydney. Several rivers originate in the area of the Snowy Mountains; the largest of them is the Murray River; the second largest bears the beautiful name of Murrumbidgee River. It later becomes a tributary of the Murray. The combined rivers flow westward at first, then suddenly turn south and empty into the Antarctic Ocean near Adelaide (Fig. 2). Both the Murray and the Murrumbidgee have a number of minor tributaries.

**J**ust two rivers flow in the opposite direction. The Eucumbene flows straight south, joins waters with the Snowy River,  
**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

and the combined rivers (called Snowy River from then on) flow first eastward for a short distance. Then the Snowy River turns south and, after some meandering, empties into the Bass Strait that separates Tasmania from Australia. That the Snowy River flows east and south is in itself unimportant; what annoyed the Australians is that it flows through an area where the water is not really needed. If it could be made to join the Murray River, it would be more useful, because farther downstream along the course of the Murray there is land that needs irrigation.

Australian surveyors produced a detailed map of the area where the Snowy River and its most important tributary, the Eucumbene originate. It is a section of the Great Dividing Range to the west of the small city of Cooma, measuring roughly 35 miles from west to east and a little more than that from north to south. There the mountain chains form an inverted V; the whole area is at a fairly high elevation, Cooma itself being 2700 feet above sea level. Diverting the Eucumbene and Snowy rivers westward would bring needed water to dry regions to the north of Melbourne.

The two rivers meet (or by now one should say "met") near the town of Jindabyne, so the thing to do for river diversion would be

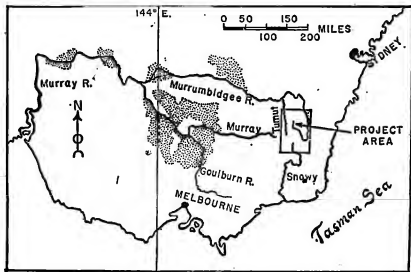


Fig. 2. The Rivers of Southeast Australia.

Dotted areas are or will be irrigated by the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

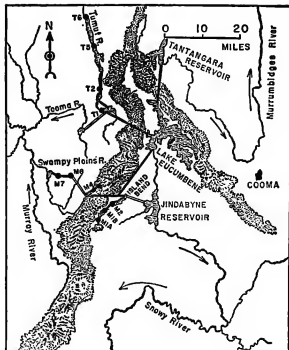
to build a dam below the confluence of the two rivers to store the water in a reservoir, which is always the first step. The next step is to make the water go where one wants it to go and that is where the problems — and the hard thinking — began. The mountains to the west are around 3000 feet tall (some taller), measured from the elevation of Jindabyne. Of course one can pump water to such an elevation, but this costs energy. It is true that one gets this energy, or most of it, back when the water falls down the other side of the mountain into a hydroelectric power plant

built for the purpose. But even if the net expenditure of energy were zero, it still needs a costly installation that eats up more money for maintenance. Just drilling a tunnel through the mountains might be cheaper in the long run, even though tunneling is expensive, too.

By then the engineers had begun to consider level differences. The waters of the combined rivers would be over 2000 feet above the level plain to the west of the mountains, and that represents such a large amount of potential energy that nobody in his right mind would waste it. The energy

Fig. 3. The Snowy Mountains Scheme.

Straight double lines indicate tunnels, the black dots are power stations; they are numbered M 1, etc., if they belong to the Murray River portion of the Project, and T 1, etc., if they belong to the Tumut River section. Missing numbers indicate power stations that might be added later.



contained in the water should be converted to electric current, and there was the side-thought, of course, that the sale of the current would pay for the project itself in time.

In order to squeeze all the potential energy out of the high-level water of the Snowy Mountains area, more than one storage reservoir was required. To utilize the drop of the stored water most efficiently, it should be interrupted in several places by power stations. There had to be connecting tunnels.

This is the way projects grow.

The Snowy Mountains Scheme, when planning was finished, called for the creation of three major and a number of lesser artificial lakes, the requisite number of dams, a total of 24 miles of tunnels ranging from 14 to 24 feet in diameter and not less than eleven power stations (with another three possible), some of them underground. A small town named

Adaminaby inside the mountains V would be drowned by one of the artificial lakes and would have to be moved across the mountains to a new site. The geographical facts dictated that efficiency of power production would be increased if the Tooma River to the west of the V, normally a tributary of the Murray, should be dammed and its water diverted into the Tumut River which is a tributary of the Murrumbidgee. This would not change the irrigation scheme because farther downstream the Murray and the Murrumbidgee come together.

When the plan was evolved, Australia still counted its money in pounds sterling; now they have "\$A," which means Australian dollars, and the price of the whole is a round billion \$A or \$1.12 billion in U.S. money. The gain is a large irrigated area to the west of the project and three million kilowatts from the project.

**I**t began with a dam to hold back the waters of the Eucumbene River. The dam is an earth and rockfill dam, half a mile in thickness at its base and with a height of 381 feet. It was built by a group of contractors from the United States and was completed in May 1958 — two years ahead of schedule. The artificial lake formed (the one

that drowned old Adaminaby) has the name of Lake Eucumbene, and it is a big lake. Its total capacity is 3,860,000 acre-feet, a measure that is slowly going out of style (thank God) and therefore needs explaining. It is what its name says, enough water to cover an area of one acre to a depth of one foot, a feat that needs 272,000 gallons. The storage capacity of Lake Eucumbene works out to a little more than a million million gallons.

Fig. 3 shows the Snowy Mountain Scheme, and in order to understand the route into which the water has been forced, let us begin in the northeast with the Tantangara Reservoir. A tunnel goes from this reservoir through the mountains into Lake Eucumbene. From the southern end of Lake Eucumbene two tunnels emerge; one goes westward through the mountains to the Tumut River section of the overall project, the other joins another tunnel near a smaller reservoir called Island Bend Pond. These two tunnels from Lake Eucumbene are two-way tunnels; the flow can go either way, depending on the levels of the various bodies of water. All other tunnels are strictly one-way. A tunnel goes westward from the Jindabyne Reservoir to join with Island Bend Pond and the two-way tunnel from Lake Eucumbene. Then it goes due

west through the mountains and ends up, after passing through two powers stations, in the Swampy Plains River. This is one section of the flow scheme.

The other section begins with the reservoir formed by the dam across the Tooma River. The water flows into Tumut Pond and then northward into the Murrumbidgee along the channel of the original Tumut River. But this river has been changed into a series of reservoirs by a number of dams. When finished there will be five power stations along this route; the fifth, called T7, is located beyond the edge of our sketch map, twelve miles to the north of T6.

By the end of 1967 all the tunneling had been done; the last of the big tunnels was completed on July 7, 1967. The Jindabyne dam, 235 feet high, was completed in 1967, too. Now, however, one has to wait for the Jindabyne Reservoir to fill up. A number of the power stations were still unfinished by the end of 1967; they were built, but the generators still had to be installed.

The only dam not even started until late in 1967 is the Talbingo Dam, which will cost 42 million Australian dollars (47 million U.S. dollars), and it will be 530 feet high.

Everything should be ready to use by the end of 1969.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

TABLE

in millions of gallons  
per annum

<b>GAIN TO MURRAY RIVER</b>	
Diversion of Snowy to Murray	179,520
minus diversion of Toomo	59,840
	119,680
Gains due to regulation of Murray	97,920
	217,600
<b>Total for Murray</b>	
<b>GAIN TO MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER</b>	
Diversion of Eucumbene	65,280
Diversion of Tooma	59,840
Gains due to regulation of Murrumbidgee	146,880
	272,000

The increase of irrigated land is equivalent to an annual gain of agricultural products worth 100 million dollars.

Will the Australians then find themselves minus a project?

That depends on another survey, in progress at this time.

If you approach Australia by sea from the south, you pass between Kangaroo Island and Cape Catastrophe to enter the Spencer Gulf. This is the sea route you have to take if you have legitimate business at Woomera, the launch pad area of the Australian rocket range. If you came by air from the Australian east coast, your map will show a few large lakes east and north of Woomera, lakes east and north of Woomera and the map will probably mention that Lake Torrens, Lake Frome and Lake Eyre, both the northern and the southern section, are salty. What the map cannot show is that these lakes, and especially Lake Eyre which lies in a larger depression, have no



fixed size and shape. One might say the maps show what these lakes should be, not what they are. In October (early summer for Australia) 1950, a party of explorers coming to Adelaide reported that Lake Eyre was actually full of water!

The survey that is now going on under the leadership of Ian B. Kiddle, professor of engineering in Melbourne, looks at the stretches of land between Port Augusta and Lake Torrens (with an area of 2400 square miles) and between Lake Torrens and the Lake Eyre basin that have an area of 3700 square miles and are, on the average, 40 feet below sea level. Kiddle's idea is quite simple; if the Lake Eyre basin could be filled with water and could be kept filled, a permanent large inland lake would result. It would be salty, so sea water could fill it up.

The question is how easily and how cheaply sea water can be brought from Spencer Gulf to the Lake Eyre basin. Based on a personal and naturally sketchy survey Professor Kiddle made in 1965 and 1966, the project does not seem to be difficult. It would start with an open ordinary canal from Port Augusta to the southern tip of Lake Torrens. Then the one expensive item would come, a level difference of 120 feet; the water would have to be pumped to that elevation to flow into

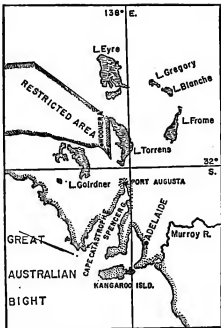


Fig. 4. The Area to the North of Spencer Gulf.

This may become the site of a project designed for climatic improvement.

Lake Torrens. Between the northern end of Lake Torrens and the basin of Lake Eyre, there are only a few low ridges of hills that would have to be cut through.

Estimated expense: \$10 million.

So far the state of South Australia is only assisting in making the survey. But if New South Wales can have its Snowy Mountain Scheme, why shouldn't South Australia have its Lake Eyre Project?

— WILLY LEY

GALAXY



Kearney sat up in Orestes' bow, one eye on his net, the other on the stars. He was a big kid with quiet eyes, hard arms and the knack. The fishing boat rocked beneath him as fishing boats have done for millennia, but with differences. For the tang of fish in salt air was substituted for the thin reek of warm insulation; for the lap of waves and gull cries there was the white star-hiss of quiet headphones and the sixty-cycle hum of machinery.

The ship herself was as homely as her task, a symmetrical cucumber all lumpy with warts. Each of these carried a net and its netman, except one large blister on the port side that was the bridge. Orestes dragged her skein through space behind her, flap-

ping empty since they'd so far caught nothing.

The net that Kearney plied so skillfully was a strange thing; a ribbon of light that wasn't light at all, but the shimmering boundary between present and future. For Orestes was a time trawler. She fished thirty gigayears into the future for raw materials to feed the hungry galaxy of the present.

Kearney hadn't had netwatch by himself until this trip; he'd just recently been qualified. But only the rulebook had held him back this long because, as everyone knew, he had the knack. Something behind those dark eyes could read the stars. Computers were all right for the ordinary netman, but nothing beat the

knack if you had it, and Kearney had it in spades.

How did he know where a star was going to be in thirty billion years? Or more exactly thirty one point 976,034,762, which was their present trawling depth? Well, he looked at them, talked to them a little. In a way he wooed them, loved them, asked them where they were going and couldn't he come along? After sitting there an hour or two, watching their slow, syncopated dance, he got an idea of things. Gavotte, twist, sometimes a just free ballet, all for grace. Kearney followed the dance.

Old ones went nova, and he knew there'd be a space there pretty soon, deep in time or shallower, depending on their size. So they wouldn't pull their little trains of followers or get in the way of others, after a while.

Kearney could even pick out those which danced awkwardly, encumbered by a system of planets, an even more valuable part of his knack. The trawlers called these the big ones, because the smallest planet was worth more commercially than the largest sun.

It's hard to tell if Kearney thought of the stars as stars. It's more likely he regarded them as birds or ghosts. Bodecs, down in centcomm, said

he sometimes heard the kid humming to himself, talking to them, even answering, "Hey little jobber, where the hell have you been?" and stuff like that. He said, "Yes," a lot too, which was weirder still.

But whatever Bodecs or the rest of them thought, they kept it to themselves, even the skipper. Kearney had the knack, and that was enough. They'd go home with a fat catch because of it. It was only a matter of time before the kid tracked down a biggy and earned them all a bonus.

So Kearney sat up in the bow bubble and talked to the stars. He spun his nets down in the future and sang to himself. He knew where they'd be, the biggies, *and he systematically avoided them.* Nobody knew that, of course.

His problem, if you want to call it that, was scruples. Big ones were valuable because of their planets. While the raw energy of stars had to be processed down to matter, planets were matter to begin with. The processing was ten times easier and cheaper, so the trawlers got ten times the normal price for them at Port Pluto. But planets often had the unsettling property of supporting life, and processing them down to raw materials was a little rough on the natives. Which turned Kearney completely off.

GALAXY

It would only have been a matter of time before his otherwise bountiful net would become conspicuous for its lack of big ones; but that time never came because something else happened first.

Kearney was probing when he felt the vibes.

He locked on. Something down there. To centcomm he said, "Bodecs? Hey Bodecs, I've got something. Little but heavy."

"Need help?"

"No, my net'll take it. But wake up the winch crew."

Seen from a few miles off, the Orestes netlifting operations were slow and unspectacular. A few lights went on, making odd blotches beneath her translucent skin. All the other nets flickered off so as not to foul Kearney's, and to leave more power for the winch. Kearney's beam grew more intense, and the veins of blue began to writhe in its milky light. The fishing ship herself swung around to tug the net in along the line of her keel. For almost an hour, nothing else happened. They towed their catch up through the thirty-billion-year quarantined layer.

The reason for the layer was obvious. You didn't want to deplete the near future to feed the present. You might end up hurting yourself, in a sense killing your grandson so that your son could be born.

THE TIME TRAWLERS

The layer was more than an inconvenience, since the deepest a good net would go was only thirty-two gigayears. So fishermen were restricted to skimming a very thin layer of the future, which made for maximum work and competition, minimum profit.

Up it came, Kearney's catch. It bobbed into the visible portion of his netbeam and stayed there, shimmering. It was a starship.

Kearney let out his breath until there was no more air and then wrung his lungs out even further. He'd done it; he'd put the Orestes on the track of a biggy. The mother system of that little round ship was lying down on the bottom somewhere nearby. He sat there and quietly hated himself. In his earphones, there was jubilation. The skipper told Kearney to swing his catch back along their ship to where the grappling beams could stuff it into the skein, and he did what he was told. Even as he worked, half a dozen netbeams swept downtime near where his prize had emerged.

They got it. Six fat nets locked on, intensified, veined and pulled. In the earphones came a babble of orders and cheers and a mild congratulation from the skipper himself. Well done! Then more orders. It would take time.

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It was a Sol-sized star with four planets. One was a neo-Venus, obviously the home of the starship. Some one calculated that she'd bring a three-thou bonus to every man aboard. Hey-y-y's came in a chorus, with more verbal pats on the back for Kearney.

Kearney switched off his net, slumped in the bubble and ran thoughtful fingers through his adolescent beard. Then, moving slowly so as not to draw a conspicuous amount of power, he swivelled his netgun's focus to the throat of the busy nets outside. He fingered power mode to repulsion, and waited. It would wreck six beam generators, maybe the ship, cost a million solars and his own life — but baby, that was going to be the big one that got away.

As the edge of their neo-Sol broke surface, Kearney triggered his netbeam and gave the power knob a vicious twist. His beam flared for a fraction of a second and went out. He'd overdone it, and the circuit breaker had blown. Even so, the six-beam net that meshed around the big one grew duller, then brighter in a series of power oscillations that rocked the Orestes. Bedlam sounded in the phones.

"What was that? . . . Damned if I know . . . Do you suppose the natives . . . Naww . . . power failure? . . . Engine room, how's

the secondary? . . . Four-oh, Skipper, I swear it. There was this big surge and . . ."

So nobody knew. Kearney was prepared to blow his skin for success, but not failure. He swung his netbeam back to where it belonged, moded for normal power, reset the breaker, and left the bubble.

The passageways were dark, all power going to the nets. He fumbled along, aided only by his pocket torch, found the crew's wardroom, and drew some blacko. The first cup shook in his hand. The second didn't, and he could think again. He'd been foolish to think they wouldn't find out. A rerun of the engineering logs — after they were done with the hectic routine of reeling in the nets — would surely give him away.

It didn't even take that long. The wardroom was a large space and, except for Kearney, empty. It echoed when the PA went on and the skipper's voice boomed, "Netman Joseph Kearney, to my cabin, on the double."

The skipper's cabin was a square room with hologram murals of Tennessee hills on two walls. It was brightly lit even now, well furnished, greenly carpeted, and the oxygen was at full earth pressure, not the gaspy eighteen-six of the crew's quarters.

Except for the furious little man behind the desk, it was a very nice place indeed. Skipper Macklin had a strip of logtape in his hand, and he shook it in Kearney's face.

"Just what in hell is this all about?"

"I tried to cut the nets."

Macklin's jaw dropped, then shut to form a wince that came with lemon sucking. "Why?"

"The natives."

"I don't believe it!" There was a long pause, ending with a sigh. "Yes, I do. Damn shame, too. You were good." Macklin stared disgustedly up at him, then got to his feet.

"Okay, out. If I see that baby face of yours for the rest of the cruise, I'll put a foot in it. Stay off the nets, you're through."

"Yes, sir."

"And Kearney."

"Yes?"

"You're lucky you're such a kid. Otherwise, I'd kill you."

Kearney reeled back to crew's quarters in a daze. For perhaps twenty minutes he felt lucky to be alive. But for the rest of the cruise he felt rotten, and they were out the full four months.

He spent a lot of time staring out the stern bubble at the skein. Though they caught several planetoids and one neo-Uranus-

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sized free planet, Kearney's biggy dwarfed them all, tugging the skeinbeams tight around her. There was even a little fear on board that she'd burst the skein, which was tantamount to having a fusion bomb go off on the back porch. But it held.

The big one had been netted up intact, with even her rotation and energy balance preserved. It was likely the natives were still alive, possibly even unaware that they traveled in a temporal pocket thirty billion years in the past.

Kearney gazed on. Men had overrun the galaxy or there would not have been any time trawlers in the first place. Quadrillions of human beings scattered among the near stars, running out of food, metal, everything. The future opened before them like a tantalizing cornucopia. If the nets reached deeper, they could catch enough other material to toss back the big ones. But as it stood, the planets were altogether necessary, even inhabited ones.

That was the problem, and there wasn't any answer. When the Orestes finally anchored half a dozen parsecs off Port Pluto, Kearney went below and stayed. He didn't want to see the processing. He didn't want to see the awful explosion when Orestes dropped her shield and the neo-Venus found herself thirty gigayears displaced in time, her sun

slowly going out, her orbit wavering, her floods, her freezing, her loss of air. But most of all, Kearney didn't want to see the planet rent and ground to elements by the mining beams, or the endless line of space trucks that bore off the fragments like titanic hearse.

It was about this time that Kearney had a thought. It was a good thought, and he decided to devote the rest of his life to it.

He'd aged twenty years. The beard was fuller, the hair on his head thinner. Kearney still carried himself well, and though the springy grace of youth had gone, it had been replaced by the ponderous strength of a shot-putter. What few friends he had admired him.

But at thirty-eight Kearney had very few friends indeed. It was bad enough to trawl for a living, but he seemed to trawl for pleasure as well. He hadn't seen earth for six years, and only went into Port Pluto to sell his fish. Kearney was a loner.

After old Macklin had fired him, things had been difficult. He'd been blackballed. Fortunately the reputation of his knack went along with his reputation as a maverick, and commercial fishermen were a practical lot. He found work. In the course of four

years on the boats out of Pluto he'd only turned up one more biggy. Lots of asteroids and suns, but only one biggy.

Then he'd bought his own boat, a leaky old smack with her name stenciled on the stern: *Limpet*. Somewhere along the line a crank had switched the final 't' to an 'r,' and none of her long string of owners had since seen fit to change it.

It was then that Kearney began his project. Alone on the *Limper*, he changed his tactics from avoiding the big ones to seeking them out. With his knack it wasn't difficult, either; he could have been a rich man. Yet the wholesalers to whom Kearney sold his catch had yet to record his bringing in a big one.

The biggy kicking in his nets right now was his fortieth. As he locked in the winch beams, Kearney hummed in self-congratulation: forty in sixteen years. Leaving the *Limper* to finish hauling in by herself, he crawled out of the bubble and into his cramped combined bridge and cabin.

Out came the thick notebook, of which thirty-nine pages were littered with notes, dates, calculations. It was quite like an anthropologist's fieldbook: thirty families of monkeys in their wild habitats. Discovered at different times. Habits noted. Notes of Jatter visits. Each family had been

given a toy — or was it a tool? — on an early visit, and their use of it observed on subsequent dates. There were gigayears between observations, sometimes. Some pages had stars, some x's, at least fifteen were crossed out blackly, failures for one reason or another. Nine were blank because there had been no monkeys at all.

Kearney flipped to a blank page and put (40) in the upper left corner. Then:

*Big one Forty. Spatial location 790 x 328 x 237 Temporal location: September 11, 3181 — plus 31.089,468,973,*

Then he dropped the pen into the crotch of the binding to mark his place and went over to the locker. He got out his diving suit, then sat down where he could see the netbeam reeling its catch up through the millennia, and waited.

**I**t bobbed to the surface an hour later: small, high intensity sun ringed by no less than seventeen planets. He took readings and immediately wrote off the first six and the last four as uninhabitable. Of the middle seven, the fifth looked most inviting, and he decided to hit her first. Kearney went aft to where the diving sled rested in her davits, sealed his helmet and shut the pressure lock behind him. A few minutes later the port opened and he aimed the little skiff out into space.

There was a saying that old sailors got used to the sensation of time-diving, and Kearney was an old sailor. Going from the near-perfect vacuum of space, through the side of the netbeam and into the absolute vacuum of non-time was hardly noticeable at first. But after thirty or forty seconds inside, your nose and kneecaps began to wander all over your body. A torrent of false sensations played over you like colors running through an acid head. Two minutes of it would have been unbearable, but it was usually all over in one. Kearney had long since found out that old sailors were liars.

He filtered back into real — although future — time and found himself orbiting Forty's sun in roughly the same orbit as her fifth planet. He wheeled the sled into the smaller body's gravity well and let her pull it down, saving power, another trick only a man with a knack would dare. As he broke through the clouds and got his first good look, it was obvious that he'd guessed correctly.

Forty-dash-Five was a water-world, the driest areas just sandy marshes full of brilliantly blue weeds. With a symmetry that only intelligence could produce, canals mazed through them. Tetrahedral domes of jelly lined the canals.



Kearney picked the largest dome in view and landed next to it. Inside, four heads each with an eye and nine arms, stared hostilely out at him. Each arm held a spear. Kearney fought the urge to vomit, deciding then and there that he'd made no attempt to communicate.

He put the wheel and crossbow, plus a dozen other mindbenders into the hatch and ejected them. Next, a barrel-sized sphere of stainless steel went out. In it was a world of information — including his own biography and a promise to return.

When he took off again, some two dozen spears glanced off his hull. If he came back in a hundred years they'd be bullets, he hoped. But judging by their present state of evolution, he made a mental note to hold off for at least a few hundred thousand.

Kearney found life on none of the other six planets. About average, he sighed. Quite tired now, he headed back toward the apex of the net beam, and Limper. The last thing he did before turning in was to set up a rep shield around Forty.

A few months later, Kearney headed into Port Pluto to drop his catch and pick up some fuel and supplies. The Limper towed laboriously at her skeinful of fish. Actually, she didn't tow

them: her skeinbeams displaced their spatial coordinates of the future with those of the present. But this took energy — of which Limper had little — and she moved slowly.

Kearney anchored out at the processing station and cut the skein field. The displaced hydrogen of real space parted with a bang to accept two suns and an asteroid out of the future, and for a few seconds the fireworks were quite impressive. The wholesaler Androsias cheated him as usual, and as usual Kearney didn't stop to haggle. He left Limper at the piers and took a shuttle into Pluto. He needed supplies, and a night off.

The city was built on the inside surface of the hollowed-out planet. She was spun by external means — ion beams up on her frozen outside surface — and centrifugal force kept things attached to the inside shell with about half their normal weight. In essence it was an inside-out little place, quite unsettling until you got used to looking up and seeing down on the other side of the world, beyond the bluish artificial sun that was hung right in the middle by guywires.

Like most of the other buildings there, Pulaski's Bar was a hole in the ground. Kearney descended the widening spiral of steps that ran down the cone-

shaped walls from above, then walked across thirty feet of flat floor to the circular bar in the middle.

Pulaski was alone. When he glanced out from under his hologlasses he merely said. "Oh, howsa."

"Okay. What's on?"

"Nothin' much. News." He took off the glasses, blinked. "Anverse?"

"If it's fresh." It wasn't, but Kearney sipped the murky euphoric and stared into the holomurals. Pulaski put his glasses back on and returned to his slouch against the back of the bar. The Alps and the Pacific were superimposed to give old earth a grander scene than she was ever mother of; that was one segment of the mural. On the other was a scene from the docks of New Orleans, circa 1890. Whenever did they dig these up. The Anverse began its work, and Kearney built a lifedream around the high-breasted crinoline creature in the foreground.

Customers came and went, one or two at a time, but Kearney dreamed on. He had a second glass and considered redreaming the same thing with slight changes, decided against it and ordered an anti. He was almost unbent again when Bobby Macklin and his crew rolled in. They

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weren't on anverse. Alky and plenty of it was what they ordered, and obviously had been ordering for some time.

Bobby Macklin was Skipper Macklin's son. When the old skipper died, Bobby had taken over. Kearney knew the man slightly and avoided him. It was not out of malice to the father, either, but simply because the son was an unpleasant sort, not worth the time.

Bobby, however, avoided no one. Peering across Pulaski's thin shoulder, he muttered a question thickly to one of his mates. Then, eyes widening, he answered the question himself. "Damn! It's him!" The fleshy finger pointed, and Kearney found himself looking into four pairs of slightly incredulous but very hostile eyes. As a man, the quartet got up and came around to take seats beside him.

"Hello, Bobby."

Thick hand on his shoulder, thick breath in his face. "Why, hi there old buddy. How's the sabotaging business, these days?" Feeling Kearney's muscles tighten under his hand, Bobby removed it quickly, sat up, went on in a louder voice. "Guess what the boys and I found out in the Grand Banks last month?"

"I couldn't."

"Well, we found a little old radiobuoy that was signaling 'J. S.

Kearney, FGS Limpet, No. Eleven.' So, I say to the boys, gee-whiz but our old buddy Kearney has staked himself a claim over there, and maybe there's others nearby. Because everybody knows what a knack old Kearney's got. That's what I said, right guys?"

Murmurs, nods, leers. Two customers started down the stairs, took one look at what was shaping up and fled.

"So you came over to raid my claim." Kearney said evenly. Like every other time trawler, he had claim buoys all over space, marking catches that were inconvenient to haul in or else so low in yield they might not pay their own way in skein energy. But Kearney had some others, too, special ones, forty of them.

Bobby ignored the accusation. "Anyway, we were fishing close by when guess what?"

Yes, it had been one of the forty, Kearney decided. "You fouled your nets?" he said, dropping his foot from the rung of the barstool to the floor.

"Fouled?" the gross man shouted. "Fouled? Burnt to a crisp! Blew two beamguns right off my ship, punctured two lazarettes. And I said, that's just like Kearney. He did it to my old man and he'd do it to anyone. Sabotaging a buoy. A repulsor shield, a god-damn repulsor shield!"

Kearney rose to his feet, his chin inches from Bobby's up-raised face. "People who don't steal don't get into trouble." Bobby had his back to the bar, and Kearney pressed him against it lightly with the palm of his right hand, chucked him mockingly under the chin with the other. The fat man's cheeks went as red as his eyes and he was literally speechless. The pulpy mouth opened and for a second all that came out was a stammering hiss. But it ended. "Get him!"

Kearney pushed hard, sending Bobby careening over the bar. At the same time, he swung his head down and to the left, pivoting out of the clinch on his left foot. A bottle and the edge of a knuckle hand whistled through the air where his head had been and crashed on the table.

But the third of Macklin's netmen stayed with him, and before Kearney could straighten up from the dodge he felt hands in his beard and saw a knee coming up toward his face. All he had time to do was turn his head, and the sledgehammer hit his ear. He exploded backward from the force of it, so hard that his opponent was left holding two handfuls of whiskers.

Pain brings fury to some men. One must be careful when beating such a man not to hurt without maiming. Hair tearing, unfortun-

ately, imparts maximum pain, does minimum damage. When Kearney got back on his feet, he was so incensed he wasn't even human.

He was back at his antagonist in one step. Planting his left foot, he executed a perfect punt on the other's chin with the right. It made a messy sound and left the man with loose gravel for teeth.

The first two were right behind, and one grabbed Kearney's foot, twisted and heaved. Kearney cartwheeled across the room and smashed into the wall. Half a breath later, Bobby's man came at him head down in a ram rush designed to spread Kearney's guts all over the flint glass mural screen. Kearney sidestepped. Bash! The man groaned when he hit; but, just to make sure, Kearney chopped twice at the thick neck before he hit the floor.

There was one left. Kearney came at him in a storm of knuckles. The man made a high sound in the back of his throat and fled. Kearney chased him halfway up the stairs, ran out of breath, and came dizzily down. He'd had it; that first headblow was getting to him.

Pulaski's hands appeared over the edge of the bar, followed by the upper half of his apprehensive face, a perfect Kilroy. Then they disappeared and when he re-

emerged, Pulaski was hauling a still windknocked Bobby Macklin to his feet.

"You broke four bottles," he said accusingly to Kearney, pointing to a mess of stains and broken glass on Bobby's backside.

"I'll pay. Got any water?" He dragged Bobby back on the customer's side of the bar and propped him up on a stool. Kearney took a long gulp from the glass Pulaski offered and threw the rest in Bobby's face.

"So you raided my buoy. What'd you do with the fish?"

"Nothing, we couldn't bring her in."

"You know what I'd have done if you had?" Kearney rapped him ungently on the windpipe.

"I can guess," he wheezed.

Kearney fought an urge to beat the man systematically to jelly. But he went over and retrieved what was left of his torn jacket from where it had come off near the wall. Then he paid Pulaski and went out.

Forty minutes later, Kearney had ordered a shuttle load of supplies and was on his way out to the Limper. No telling what Bobby had done to biggy Eleven when he'd dropped his nets on it. Wailing in protest at the throttle Kearney fed her, Limper was on her way to the Grand Banks within the hour.

Not surprisingly, the buoy had

been destroyed, but there was considerable debris floating nearby to mark the place. Kearney grinned. He anchored and reached down the notebook.

Inhabited system Eleven. Spatial location 473 x 492 x 845. Temporal location: August 14, 3169 — plus 31.085,672,909. G-type, probably from Westover's Galaxy. One planet, two satellites, forty-hour day, twenty-seven month year. Natives semi-aquatic, scaled quadrupeds. IQ's around twenty. Left a complete set of plans. Give them about a quarter gigayear for development, and they should be ready.

Kearney made another entry describing Bobby's raid. Then he coded off the rep shield that had saved his fish from Bobby and went about trawling for her himself. In two hours he was in the sled, riding his terminal orbit around Eleven-dash-one.

Although the last time he'd been there was by local reckoning three hundred million years earlier, most of the landscape was fairly familiar. By landscape one meant topography; the scenery itself was vastly different. Eleven-one had gone from prehistoric ferns to solid city. She was just as crowded as the planets of Kearney's own time.

The largest city in view had a peculiar geometry. Some power-

ful planner had laid a mile-broad letter K on the countryside and built his roads to suit it. True, the interplaited cross streets were rarely symmetrical, but it had a certain beauty. Kearney felt god-like. At the intersection of the K was a park, wide green, water-laced. A swamp, in fact. He drifted the sled for it, hit somewhere near the middle.

The woman — or so he judged her — who met him was greenish and reptilian, but rather pretty. Six or seven newts clustered fearfully around her as Kearney's sled settled into the tall grass, not twenty yards from their picnic table. Kearney stepped out, prepared to go through the take-me-to-your-leader bit; but she shortstopped the whole thing with four words.

"By Kearney," she whispered, "It's Kearney."

The ride through town to Super's palace gave him a chance to see what he'd wrought. Obviously he'd induced terrestrial evolution on what was basically an aquatic species, but they seemed none the worse for it. Doorknobs for webbed hands were the size of footballs and softly textured. Perambulators for newtlets were water filled. But everyone had the look of well-being that only a sophisticated use of science and democratic philosophy could bring about. So somehow he felt

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he hadn't left them too bad a legacy, three gigs earlier.

Super had the tall careful awkwardness of a Lincoln. He was worn-scaled and gray-green, the lighter shade apparently owing to age. And like the rest of them, his completely smooth body gave no reason for him to have been other than unclad. Behind his wide wooden desk lay the shell of a seed Kearney had shown three gigayears earlier.

"Kearney. So you're not a leg-end after all."

"Oh, I'm real."

"Well, thanks for this," Super said, waving a webbed hand at the steel capsule. "We've used it all. We've even got time trawlers of our own, now."

"You're welcome. Ready to pay for it?"

Super looked startled. "Pay?"

"Look, I came across your system by time trawling myself. You could easily have been reeled back to my own time and reduced to raw materials. As a matter of fact you still can."

Moisture glistened around Super's gill slits. "Extortion, Kearney?"

"Mildly, yes. I want a promise. Now you're time trawling yourself. You have the same power over future systems that I've had over you. I want you to promise to treat them as I've treated you.

In other words, throw back the big ones. And educate them."

Super looked relieved.

"In addition," Kearney began —

Sunlight through the tall window faded, grew to double brilliance, then settled back to normal. Super cried, "What?" Kearney, smacking his forehead with a palm, said, "Murder! It must be Bobby."

After Kearney had left him in the debris of Pulaski's bottles and his own crewmen, Bobby Macklin was a frightened man. But back on his own ship he got braver. Orestes was twenty times the size of Limper, and could eat the little ship and spit out the bones before Kearney knew what hit him. That was Bobby's plan. He was quite sure Kearney would go out to that pet biggy of his and check on things. So, not two hours after Kearney left, Bobby was hot behind him.

"I've got him on visual, Skipper. Looks like he's got that biggy up the surface."

"Good, he's saved us the trouble. Anchor, and get him on the Y band. Bobby settled contentedly back in the skipper's couch and leered out the port at Kearney's defenseless ship.

"Can't raise him — oh, wait, his autopilot's putting out a Standard Three. He's left the ship and

gone diving down in the biggy."

Bobby grinned. "And that's where he'll stay. Send a crew over and transfer the fish from his net to ours. And have them bring back his diving phone. I want to say good-bye to dear old Kearney."

Down on Eleven-one, Kearney and Super sat in the latter's office.

"You're sure he'll call?" the green man asked.

"Yes, soon. It'd be his style to gloat. The blink in the sunlight was caused by his shifting us from one net to the other. Which means —"

"Which means, if I may quote, we're in the fire."

"Where'd you get that expression?"

"From the same encyclopedia that you both blessed and burdened us with willy-nilly three gigs ago."

"Come on, Super. Until now you were grateful."

"Until now. Agreed, you're the best of your type, Kearney; but men are a race of exploiters, pure and simple. Your friend would just as soon process us as —"

"My what? Now look, I have told you how this was supposed to work out. Bobby's just —"

"Hey, Kearney," tinned a voice inside his helmet.

"Yeah, Bobby, hello."

"Got you now, baby." There <sup>SKINN</sup> was a nasty snicker. "When they run you through the processor you'll probably come out looking like —"

"Okay, okay. Look, I want to buy my way out."

"With what? I've already got your ship. And this biggy."

"Peanuts. I can give you twice that."

"From where?"

"Let me up, and I'll tell you."

The snicker expanded to a laugh. "Squirm, baby. You're never getting out." Bobby clicked off.

"What now?" Super asked hopelessly. Even as they spoke the sun blinked again, indicating that their captor had shifted them to his skein.

Kearney shrugged. "We've got — let's see — probably ten of your days to come up with something."

Bobby Macklin called down into the skein in hopes of pulling a few more legs off his flies, but the flies wouldn't give him that satisfaction. He had the growing suspicion that something was brewing down there, and so he had ordered Orestes back to Port Pluto as fast as she could tow her load. The sooner he'd reduced Kearney to a handful of minerals, the better. But he wasn't quick enough. They were still four

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days off Pluto when his after netman called in.

"Skipper, there's something going on out in the skein."

Macklin rushed aft and peered out the stern bubble. There certainly was something going on. The sack of woven energy squirmed like the belly of a pregnant mare. It became bloated. Through its translucent walls Bobby and his crew saw not only one big one with her planet and moons, but four other stars.

"Quick, try and get Kearney." He was handed the phone. "Hey, Kearney, what gives?"

"Your skein, if you don't drop us."

"Where're you getting . . ."

"The future, our future. Sixty-five gigs from you. Listen, fat-head, drop us or else. You know what a burst skein'll do to your ship."

"Yeah, louse," He clicked off. "Cut the skein. He's got us."

The beams flickered out, and Kearney, Super biggy Eleven's entire system and baggage dropped down through the cons to its own time.

Bobby Macklin rebuilt the skein, then headed disgustedly back to the Grand Banks for four months of fishing, legitimate, this time. Consequently, when he returned to Port Pluto he found himself one of the last to hear.

Kearney had headed for Port

Pluto as soon as he'd gotten back to his ship. He'd gone to Galcouncil with a weird looking alien in tow, and made his pitch.

It was quite simple. What one did was throw back the big ones and teach them to time trawl themselves. For this the fishermen received two percent of the big one's own catch.

In a sense, Super had been right. Kearney's was a race of exploiters. But it took an honestly humane man like Kearney to dream up a cycle of exploitation where nobody lost. Under his plan the future did indeed open like an infinite cornucopia — of both raw materials and manpower — a huge cone whose base lay gigagigayears in the future. Each layer had only to go out and educate the next, then take their nominal two percent. But two percent of infinity is infinity, and each layer had more than enough supporters on the next to sustain it. Not only was it infinitely easier all around, but no big ones would ever have to be processed.

Bobby Macklin, returning from his four-month cruise, was among the last to know. The law had been in effect just about three days when he brought in the catch of his career and had it processed. A big one, his first and his last. Anyone's last.

—BURT FILER

GALAXY



## *Galaxy Bookshelf*

by ALGIS BUDRYS

Oh, gang, he's back! Back from the lost lands, the same as ever, and a gladsome sight he is. Ageless, very cool . . . well, no; I was never that. Flash was — Flash Gordon, star of *Flash Gordon* by Alex Raymond, a huge, wonderful picture book made of the old Sunday newspaper series by Nostalgia Press, Box 293,

Franklin Square, New York 11010. But it's me that's back. The return one celebrates with a book like this is one's own. There I am, with the smell of cheap ink and Sunday afternoon carpet in my nostrils.

(Hell, I know there's a Flash Gordon still. I even know some of the people who've worked on him in recent years. I know their opinions, their voices, the color of their neckties, for God's sake. Quick — what color was Alex Raymond's necktie?)

But I'm assuming too much. Some of you may need updating

Yes, Klaus, there really was a Flash Gordon, Yale graduate and world-renowned polo player, and he did pit himself against Ming the Merciless upon the planet Mongo, to which he had flown in the experimental rocket ship of the megalomaniacal Dr. Hans Zarkov, foremost scientific figure of the 1930's. With him, Dale Arden, in a dumb red hat. The present-day imposter, with his doe eyes and tapering fingers, is a present-day imposter.

There on Mongo — where Zarkov's brain cleared, and the drawing improved, too — the mighty Flash encountered the damndest technological political situation ever made believable by mortal man. A giant electric octopod terrorized the free and independent polar kingdom of the

proud Fria, queen of Frigia, sexy blonde, commander of the pano-plyed snowbird lancers, mistress of a medieval palace to which one traveled either by sled or rocketship, and stubborn holdout against the otherwise all-encompassing rule of the mighty Ming.

Traitors by the dozens menace the tranquility of Arborea, an urban civilization of bow-bearing freemen ensconced in the gigantic trees of what appears to be Mongo's Pacific Northwest, where Prince Barin and the Princess Aura hold out stubbornly against the otherwise all-encompassing rule of Ming the magnificent, evil genius and absolute ruler of all he surveys.

Underfoot, the powermen pad on rubber boots, wearing airplane goggles, hating Ming, fixing his wiring and waiting for an Earthman to come along and point out that they do, literally, hold the power.

Yes sir. And all the girls wear clothes you can see through.

Oh, yes, sir!

Alex Raymond is a long time dead. He went off to World War II, and clods fell not on his grave but on his work. When he came back, he did some illustrations for *Astounding* — not very good ones; somewhere, he had forgotten something — and then he started a crime strip which

was very good but lacked snow-bird lancers. He crashed a car and died.

But Flash has been waiting back there all these years, along with you and me, waiting to be rediscovered along with you and me.

Nearly every page of this big book is filled with more than Raymond's drawing — that effect varied, as various people inked it, and several panels obviously never saw the inside of Raymond's brain at all; I wonder what happened to the episodes for 5-12 and 6-30-40, neither of them signed. Momentary slips hardly matter, though. This book is filled with Raymond's marvelous sense of story, which transcended mere logic and the fruits of reality. It struck hard at the wellsprings of hope; hope for the little bit of hero in all of us, hope that something would happen to take us out of ourselves and test us, hope that what the tests revealed would be the envy of man, woman and child.

The drawing, by the way, is often marvelous. The absence of the color, which has been omitted from these full-size reprintings, is probably an advantage. It was clearly also an economic necessity. Even so, the book costs an arm and a leg — \$12.50. But I've done my best to save that bad news for last. Surely there is some GALAXY BOOKSHELF

bank you could rob. I mean, at times Raymond very carefully invented a calligraphy of its own for Mongo, and these rather attractive tracteries are occasionally shown in billboards or on store signs. But when Flash wanted to irritate Ming, he grabbed off one of his officers, stripped him, and sent him back to the Merciless, lettered in honest Yale block capitals: ON THIS FAT BELLY I DO DECLARE THAT MING IS A PUNK BEYOND COMPARE.

Can you pass it up? Come back to your Sunday self.

*Cryptozoic*, by Brian Aldiss, on the other hand, is a novel that goes forward to itself, but not very well. Its major premise is "mind travel," which is apparently a kind of time travel one gets into by taking a drug and adopting an appropriate mental attitude. It's not astral projection, or some temporal equivalent of it, for the traveler does absent himself from the here and now, retaining only the most tenuous of links with contemporaneity, leaving a bit of blood and a gobbet of tissue behind. He can take some things with him — clothes, a motorbike, a tent, food — even though these objects are not drugged. He needs to be able to take along a kind of machine called an "air leaker," or he couldn't

breathe in the past . . . because he can't touch the past. The air leaker apparently can, at least well enough to somehow grab molecules of air and distempor them in sufficient concentration to keep the traveler alive, if not ebullient.

This is all right, because in all this book there is not one person who enjoys life, makes life better for anyone, says anything worth remembering, or accomplishes a clearcut triumph. Which is odd, because in this book a man proves conclusively that time runs exactly in reverse of how we think it does; when he dies, the very ages mourn at his inchrondescent pyre. Another man becomes the creator of immortal works of art. A third man overcomes great psychological odds in straining very close to love. But these occurrences, toward which the story seems to point, or on which it appears to pivot, are spoken of, or reported, or lectured upon. When shown at all, they are shown as if in coarse-grained silent black and white intrusion on a 1935 Agfa-color underground movie about desolation. De-soul-ation. The sole achin'. The-soul-I-shun . . . You follow me? In weak tints, with camera either fixed too long or wobblishly hand-held, *Cryptozoic* sucks on and on and over through the same five minutes'

worth of mood; when it exerts itself to tell us a little bit about the England(s) its people started from, it can tell us only that they are the bleaker the farther into the future they get. The hreo is less gifted, less emphatic, less filial, less likeable — but his girl friend is no grubbier — the more the world's calendar advances. He is no longer an artist, no longer a lover . . . not even of his mother . . . no longer a human being as he beats up a man with a golf club in an interrogation room scene that is to my knowledge unsurpassed in this field for reader uninvolverment.

Aldiss's "science" breaks down constantly. We deal with a scale of unimaginable years — from the beginning of the world to the very end — and yet in his wanderings he occasionally cannot penetrate through a past tree, or a palace, because "it has been there too long" to be insubstantial! He has his air leaker, but he is astonished when the Dark Woman's gang can fire gas guns into their past. He and the other mind travelers are leaving feces stranded all over the past, but he doesn't stop to wonder where his exhalations go, what happens to motorbike exhaust . . . and he drinks "concentrated water."

Carp, do I? Hardly. The point is, Aldiss hardly cares what

patch-up excuse he gives for his hero's doing or not doing the things he does in this story. Notion first, and all else second, he wants to tell us about isolation, degeneration, and all those other downhill things. Because he then wants to do something else — pull off a tour de force chapter in which Stein the ein explains our pains by pushing the notion that time runs contrariwise to our perception of it — that the ugly "future" of complication and all that other erected structure of civilization is in fact behind us, and that we are progressing into the simple, uncomplex, more talented "past" of the history which we remember because what we think of as memory is in fact pre-cognition. Our actual memory — of what we erroneously call the future — is lousy.

At least, I think this what he wanted to do at one stage, for he surely went to a great deal of trouble to explain why his hero, Bush, would want to return to the womb. But either because he always planned to then confuse us further, or because he felt himself slipping sidewise through some sort of morass, or because it would have been un-good or un-cool or un-self to actually come right out and make some sort of statement, he pulls out in the end with some babble about how it was all an insane dream. "Each

reader must decide for himself" what this book is about, says Doubleday's blurb writer, and that's your tipoff.

This book is a pretty good example of why the "new wave" of sf is evocative, often exciting, always willing, but also illustrative of the fact that, *nevertheless*, it is just as easy as ever to lose control of a story.

There can be no quarrel with an attempt to get out of the old ruts; the world is chilly, few of us are heroes, and not many ideals support much weight. It was always so, but perhaps there is something more valid for fiction to do than simply to inspire. Maybe it can, instead, show us ways in which we personally can cope, without at the same time demanding that we give up our jobs, tear up our mortgages, and haunt hilltops, waiting to be picked up by talent scouts in flying saucers.

But this is a useless book. It tells us that the writer thinks he's clever. It even proves that he is, indeed, notionally facile, and perhaps admirable for not having gone into doing advertising. Really, this is what it tells us, when all the words are gone by. What a pity.

It may be that Keith Laumer's associations with the U.S. diplomatic corps were quite different

from mine with another, but I have always felt the Retief stories, no matter how individually good — or bad — were fundamentally based either on an error of observation or an even less commendable catering to the supposed preconceptions of the audience. So I've always been cool to Retief, and thence to Laumer, because for years this was the level he appeared to be working at.

But *Earthblood*, done with the late Rosel Brown, was something else again; and so, emphatically, is *"The Day Before Forever"* and *"Thunderhead"* (Doubleday, \$3.95), which is all Laumer, a yard wide, and all very good.

These are two long stories, of which "Day" is far the longer. I imagine Laumer also ought to be given the credit for refusing to blow up a short novel into book length.

"Thunderhead" is an excellently told, unexceptionable story about a man who does his duty. In a way, it's a surefire yarn — the kind that can't miss. Yet this kind of story can be monstrously hard to write. The hero is more faithful, more persevering, more resolute, more staminous than you or I could be, and one slip by the writer in describing him or his ever-increasing problems could break the spell and turn him into a figure of pure corn. Where this kind of story gets its

necessary tension, as a matter of fact, is in balancing the reader's true capabilities against the actions of this costume the author draws over him for a while. (Put seven league boots on a man, and you have to convince him grating his bunions is worth it.) Seen in that light, what a writer does when he does a good job on a story like this is more of a feat than writing something by your own rules.

However that may seem, "Thunderhead" ought to be read first, as a counterpoise to "Day", because the latter is a far more difficult story.

Underneath all the events is the action line — the attempt of the uninformed, unarmed, totally alone, partially amnesiac hero to make sense out of and find room in a future society. It's a society which demonstrates in Scene One that you can die here like a beef steer without anyone's even wondering about your name or all those poignant antecedents locked in your memories. Over that are the twists; the hero's multiple identities, the paperchase clues, the masked villain, the enigmatic ally, the shattering secret of the hero's past. There is nothing here that Van Vogt hasn't done, just as there is nothing in the character that isn't reminiscent of Heinlein, from dialogue on

through some moments that make you think of *Beyond This Horizon* quite a lot. And yet there is a great deal of Laumer here, down where it counts — in the engine compartment.

The rapid narrative drive of this story, the emotional involvement with the protagonist, and the emotional charge of the ending, are there because Laumer plans for them, works to sustain them, and begins by bringing to them an exact understanding of how to make them go. There is nothing mysterious about the separate elements of this story. You get an idea for a situation — A does B because he is motivated to do so by C. This results in D, which he doesn't want, and so he now has to think of what to do to get E. (You substitute, for these various components, such things as "A becomes ruler of the world because he needs total power in order to restore life to his dead daughter," and you're off.) Then you conceal their linearity from the reader — you "spin a good yarn" — by adopting a viewpoint within this framework of events, rather than one detached outside it. Doing that, you immediately intrigue the reader just the amount required to keep him wondering what's going to happen

next, without either mystifying him to the point where he becomes confused and loses interest, or letting him see ahead and become bored.

Anyone can do it. It's a child's play, as dozens of satirists have proven, which will explain how come there are so many, many good stories written to the complete satisfaction of the standards of performance in this mode.

No? You say there *aren't* many many good action stories being told any more? That people miss a good storyteller so badly that they still mourn Alex Raymond decades after his death?

Well, I don't know. I was much younger, once, and things were simpler. I *thought* it would be easy. (I still don't like stories in which the easy is made easier by coincidence, by dumb luck, by auctorial intrusion, by hustling extra characters in out of the wings, by glossing over the hard parts with offstage voices and sound effects. I wonder if only the action modes are to prove to these well-known flaws.)

And yet there are so few who write a story as good as "The Day Before Forever." I don't know. There must be something to it after all.

—ALGIS BUDRYS

## REMEMBER:

New subscriptions and changes of address require 5 weeks to process!







# THE STAR BELOW

by DAMON KNIGHT

*Under the caves that men dared  
not enter lay other worlds — and  
dangers Man had never known!*

## I

**T**horinn, son of Goryat, stood in the darkness and listened. Stone hung heavy over his head, leagues of stone and earth,

stretching upward black and silent.

Behind him the sound of the cataract down which he had floated to this place had receded to a dull murmur, and he could

hear the gurgle of lesser streams running away somewhere below him. The falling curtains of water were all around him, ghostly silver and silent, pricked with the jewels of floating droplets. Drifting water-points burst on his lips with tiny cool kisses.

There were gaps in the falling curtains, torn by the irregular stone above. He put his head through the widest of these openings, saw other broken slabs, other curtains of water beyond.

Following the cool air, he made his way among the gray and silver curtains that hung everywhere from the ceiling. Rivulets ran toward him underfoot among the slabs of stone, and he knew by this that the floor was slanting upward. At length the falling curtains of water grew less numerous, and the sound diminished to a mournful pattering behind him. Ahead, the cavern broke into a tortured complexity of shapes in which he found a narrow passage leading upward. He paused to tip out the water from his wallet and to dry his hair as well as he could with his hands; then he followed the passage. It coiled away ahead of him, always upward, always rounded, irregular, dry and empty in the glow of his light-box.

He followed the passage, and at length it widened into a greater darkness. Thorinn stepped out into it cautiously, found himself

in a narrow cavern half-choked with a pile of fallen stone. Beyond, in the far wall, he saw a jagged opening.

He climbed the heap of stones and peered in. Light glimmered back from objects whose forms he could not make out. A breath of air came from the opening, but it was slow and stale. He hesitated a moment, then climbed through the gap in the wall and dropped to the level floor below.

Silence pressed in upon his ears, a silence more profound even than that of the passage behind him. On every side stood massive objects piled one on another, with slender rods between them. The floor he stood on was perfectly level and as smooth as ice. It was not stone, but some gray, greasy material which seemed faintly warm to the touch. The air was dry and warm. The huge columns stood in rows; their tops disappeared in the darkness.

Thorinn moved between the columns, touching them curiously as he passed. The rods, of cold metal, were racks on which were piled bundles and bales, and other things for which Thorinn had no words, all covered with some cool, water-smooth substance. He began to realize that he must be in some giant's storehouse, and he paused, listening; but the silence was unbroken.

He slid his hands curiously around one of the bundles. It was so smooth and heavy that it was hard to find any purchase on it, but he dragged it out at last and lowered it to the floor. It was almost as broad as his arms could span, vaguely oblong but with all its corners rounded, like a huge gray cheese. He looked in vain for any seam or opening; the smooth surface was unbroken.

Next he tried to cut it with his sword. At the first touch, the covering opened like a mouth. Thorinn put his fingers under the edges, marveling at the thinness and transparency of the stuff, finer than the skin of an onion. He pulled, and the tear lengthened easily. The covering split and tore without resistance, and he peeled it off in great rustling sheets. Underneath was a gray soft substance like bread dough; he could push it in, but the hollow filled out again at once, nor could he tear it with his fingers.

Again he used the sword. The gray stuff cut readily, but would not tear like the other. When he pried at the gash he had made, sticky-looking fibers at the bottom clung stubbornly together. He slashed it deeper, and at last it gave way, opening in a slit as the transparent stuff had done, and he saw something else beneath it: a gleam of russet and gold.

He tore away the gray substance in lumps, threw them aside. In the glow of his light-box a bundle of cloth lay revealed, and he caught his breath. Rich and soft beyond belief it was, russet and gold and scarlet in shimmering patterns that were not printed on the fabric but woven into it. He unfolded and unwrapped the cloth, spreading it out on the floor as he went; it covered the whole width of the aisle, and still there was more. Thorinn dropped it and stared at it in helpless wonder. Such a piece of stuff was beyond price; he could ask what he liked for it. This one bale had made him rich. And what was in all the others?

He attacked a second bundle, found it contained another cloth like the first, colored in deep purple, royal blue, peacock green. In a fury of impatience, he ran to the next aisle, found a rack of smaller bundles, some of which, no bigger than his head, had fallen to the floor. He chose one, slashed it open. Inside was a glittering device of brass and ebony, beautifully made, though he could not imagine its use.

The next was a pretty jug with a handle and a spout to pour from. He tilted it to see why it was so heavy, but only a single drop of moisture came out.

The next was a black-and-red-patterned box in which, nested in

purple velvet, lay dozens of tiny bright figurines of men and ladies.

Stunned with joy, he ran to the next aisle and found other outlandish engines; the next: Yen-metal knives smaller than his finger, with tiny blades sharper than his sword; the next: hammers, wedges, no bigger than the knives, and other tiny tools whose use he could not guess.

The fever to open more and yet more bundles made him forget weariness, cold, thirst and hunger. He found clothing — wide-skirted robes, heavy with brocade; tunics and breeks of gossamer stuff; shoes, marvelously thin and supple. He found more engines, some with parts that turned, some that did not move at all. He found rings, bracelets, ropes of jewels that spilled in a flood across the floor. Riches piled up around him, and still he was aware that he had barely begun to loot this incredible treasure-house.

Once he paused long enough to gather all his trove into one place and, sorting through it, to try to decide what he would take with him, for it was obvious that he could not carry even a tenth of what he had uncovered so far. Then the blank gray faces of the unopened parcels drove him to frenzy again, and against all com-

mon sense he attacked bundles larger than any he had yet opened, gray oblongs taller than he was, ripping open their fronts without removing them from the racks, merely to see what was inside them. (Cabinets of polished wood inlaid with nacre. More engines. Chairs with arms curved like serpents. More bales of cloth, ten times larger than the others.)

Then for weariness alone he forebore awhile and sat with his head on his heavy arms. Hunger and thirst returned. He tipped up his wallet and drank what little water was in it, but it was not enough. He began to think of finding some container and going back through the caverns for water. The wallet would do, but he wanted to keep that dry to hold his treasures. He could put some of the smallest things in it, the jewels perhaps, and for the rest make a bundle to carry on his back. But before that he must sleep, and before sleep he must have water to quench his thirst. So he turned the problem back and forth, a little thick-headed in his weariness, and came to the same conclusion ten times over, but did nothing because it was so much pleasanter not to move.

Then he remembered the jug, and opening his eyes, which he had closed in order to think better, he saw it at the edge of the pile he had made on the floor.

He got up wearily, thinking of the long way back through the tunnels. When he took up the little jug, it seemed to him that it was heavier than before. He shook it, and it gurgled. Without thinking, he tipped it over. Water splashed on his feet.

Thorinn righted the jug and stared at it. He shook it again, and it still gurgled. He put the spout cautiously to his lips, tilted it up, tasted. It was water, cold and pure. He put his head back and drank in great gulps until the jug was empty.

To make sure, he held it upside down. A single drop fell, then another, then no more. He set the jug down, sat by it and watched it awhile, but nothing happened. He picked it up, turned it over: water ran out, a thin stream that stopped almost at once. But how could there be any, when the jug had been dry a few moments since?

He put the jug down again and set himself to watch it, resolved to wait longer this time so that there could be no mistake. But he grew impatient and, telling himself that the jug would do well enough by itself, he turned his back on it and opened another bundle. This contained an engine of some sort—a gray box with rounded edges, one thicker than the others. It had no lid; it

was open but not quite empty. The bottom of the box was filled with a smooth bulge of glass or crystal. It was well made, but not especially beautiful, and he had engines enough already. Perhaps it was time to go and look at the jug? No, he had left it alone longer the first time. He picked up his light-box and walked down an aisle he had not yet explored. There were many small bundles here. He took one at random and opened it. Inside the nest of gray dough-stuff there were dozens of little boxes with bright markings on them, green, violet, yellow, red. He found the trick of opening them—you put your thumb-nail under one edge of the lid, and the box sprang apart. Inside was an oblong piece of some cheesy substance. Thorinn sniffed it, then tore off a crumb and tasted it. It was cheese—bland, with an unfamiliar flavor, but undeniably cheese. He ate the whole piece in two bites, then opened another box, and another, and ate until his belly was full. Weariness forgotten, he carried the rest of the boxes back to his treasure heap.

He picked up the little jug; it gurgled. He could not see inside it very well, but it seemed to be at least half full. He drank deeply, set the jug down. The water still remaining made a pleasant splash.

He sat down with his back against one of the bales of cloth. The box-shaped engine lay nearby on the floor. Thorinn lazily reached for it, with one foot and hooked it nearer. It slid, checked on some irregularity in the floor, then tipped forward on its heavy edge and stood upright. Inside, the crystal seemed to flicker with colored light for an instant.

"Here, that's odd," said Thorinn, sitting up.

The box flickered again, and a voice spoke.

Thorinn was on his feet without knowing how he had got there. His sword was in his hand. He whirled, looked wildly this way and that, then circled the heap of treasure and peered behind the columns, looked down the aisles. He listened, heard nothing but the pounding of his own heart.

He went back to the box and stared at it dubiously. "Was that you?" he demanded.

The voice spoke again, incomprehensibly. It was a man's deep voice, calm and measured; but where was it coming from?

"Are you in there?" Thorinn asked, stopping to peer into the box. The voice replied. The dark crystal lighted up. Thorinn saw a confused pattern of light and shadow; then part of it moved, and he saw a tiny crouched fig-

ure, dressed in stained leather, with a sword in its hand. When he moved, it moved.

"Is that me?" he cried.

The voice said, "That me?"

Thorinn looked at the box with deep distrust, withdrew a little and sat down facing it. The crystal had gone dark; now it lighted up again, and he was looking as if down a long tunnel at the same figure, with a column of stacked bundles behind it. It was like looking at oneself in a mirror. Yet when he raised his sword in his right hand, the figure raised its sword in its right hand, not its left, as in a proper mirror.

"You," said the voice.

"Yes, it's me," Thorinn replied. "How do you do that?"

The crystal went dark. "How do me do that?" said the voice.

"Yes, how do you do?" asked Thorinn impatiently. "What's the matter? Why do you talk that way?"

"Why do me talk that way?"

Thorinn felt baffled, "Yes, why do you talk that way?"

The crystal lighted again. "You talk."

"Well, of course I talk. I talk much better than you."

In the crystal, the tiny figure seemed to rush forward without moving until its face filled the box. Thorinn fell silent, but in the box he saw his own lips moving. "You talk?" asked the voice. The

face rushed forward again, and now he saw only the mouth and chin. "You talk?"

Convinced now that he had to deal with an outlander or witling, Thorinn said, "Yes, I talk," and gesturing toward his own mouth, he spoke with exaggerated clarity, opening his mouth wide with each word. "I — talk. Talk. You understand?"

"Talk," said the voice. "I understand." The crystal darkened, lighted again, and Thorinn saw a hand. It was his own hand, but when he moved his hand, the hand in the box did not move. "That's my hand," he said.

"I said so didn't I?"

"You said so. Talk." In the crystal, now he saw only one finger; the rest of the hand had turned all misty.

"That's my finger."

"That's your finger. Talk." Now he saw his thumb, and he told the voice what that was called — and then his arm, his leg, his foot, his toes, his head, his ears, his eyes and so on until he lost patience and stood up. "You ask too many questions," he said.

"You ask."

"All right, who are you? How did you get in that box?"

"Box?"

"Yes, box." Thorinn squatted, touched the box. "This thing. This box. How did you get in?"

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The crystal lighted, and he was looking at the box. A box inside the box. The box was not lighted, and it stood on a yellow surface. "This box," said the voice.

"Yes, the box. How did you get inside it?"

"I am this box. Talk." The crystal glowed, and Thorinn saw a man in stiff scarlet robes, with a shimmer of green and gold behind him. "That's a man. He must be rich."

The man disappeared, and he saw a woman with fair hair, dressed in similar robes. "That's a woman. Is it his wife?"

So they went on, and Thorinn told the box what a boy was called, a girl, a tree, a leaf, a branch; but sometimes the box showed him engines or other shapes he had never seen before, and he would say, "What's that?" or "I don't know what that is." At last his head began to droop, and the pictures in the box grew so blurred that he could not make them out at all. "Talk," said the box. His head came up with a painful jerk, and he realized that he had been asleep for just an instant.

"No more talk," he said thickly. "Good night." The box said nothing. Thorinn, too dizzy to get up, rolled onto a pile of folded cloth, pulled an edge of it over him for a blanket and was instantly asleep.



When he awoke, he had forgotten all that had happened and at first did not know where he was. Then joy filled him when he saw his treasures. He pottered about among them for a while, examining this and that, drank from the magical jug, then crawled through the hole in the wall to relieve himself outside, came back, opened one of the boxes of cheese for his breakfast and began to plan what he should do next.

He would take only a few of the choicest things, and a supply of food, for his intention now was to try to come up into the Mid-





world as near as possible to the Highlands and to walk the rest of the distance, carrying his pack. Once there, he would sell some of his treasures to buy land and horses; later, he would come back to the cavern, taking care he was not followed; he would bring a pack train, and this time carry home enough treasure to keep him for the rest of his life. Thinking of this, he began to worry about brigands and to think that he would certainly have to be accompanied by some armed men. They would have to be trusted men, so that they would not rob him themselves; yet, even so, he would have to conceal from them the place where he went under-

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ground, so that they should **not** follow him. These thoughts gave him a headache and made him feel out of sorts, and he concluded that it was not easy to be rich.

The box had said nothing since he awakened, and he was glad of that for it had tired him with its chatter the day before. It was a clever box in its way, for it pronounced everything perfectly and never had to be told anything more than once, but in other ways it was very stupid and seemed never to have heard of the commonest things.

He had another drink from the jug and set off straight down the aisle, meaning to follow it to the end. The tall columns marched past him with their heads buried in the darkness. There was no sound but his own footsteps. Here and there small parcels had been knocked to the floor, and he conjectured that an earth-shock must have done that; probably that was the cause, too, of the gap in the wall through which he had entered. Before that, the cavern must have been sealed up... for how long?

He stopped, listened. The quality of the silence in the cavern was the same, a feeling of vast space. When he scraped his foot on the floor, no sharp echo came back from ahead, where the wall of the cavern ought to be. When

he had gone another hundred paces, he stopped again, and it was just the same. He had supposed this must be a small cavern, like those outside; but what if it were huge?

The thought of so much treasure, endless, uncountable rows of it, oppressed him instead of raising his spirits. After a moment he turned and started back.

**I**n no time at all, it seemed, he was back at his heap of treasure.

"Box," he said.

There was no answer, and the box did not light up.

Alarmed, he took a step nearer. "Box, are you there?"

"I am here," said the box.

"Well, why didn't you answer before?"

"You did not ask."

"Oh." Thorinn thought about this a moment. "Well, how big is this cave?"

"What is this cave?"

"This cave," Thorinn said, waving his arms. "This place here, where we are."

"What is how big?"

"How big," Thorinn said, waving his arms again by way of explanation. "How many ells?"

"What are ells?"

Thorinn sat down on the floor and stared at the box in exasperation. "Ells are — well, anybody knows that. Ells are how long

something is." He spread his hands apart. "This is an ell."

The box said, "How long are you?"

"You mean how tall. Two ells. I'm two ells tall."

In the crystal, two yellow marks appeared. "How many?"

"Two."

One of the marks vanished. "How many?"

"One."

Two more appeared. "How many?"

"Three."

The box, Thorinn realized, did not even know how to count. So they went on until they got to twenty-one, and then the box said, "Two tens are twenty?"

"Yes, that's right, and three tens are thirty."

"And four tens?"

"Four tens are forty. Five tens are fifty, six tens are sixty." At a hundred and ten, the box stopped him again.

"Ten tens are a hundred?"

"Yes."

"This cave is eight hundred fifty ells long, fifteen ells tall." In the crystal, a brightly lighted little hollow shape appeared. It was like a very long, narrow box. At "eight hundred fifty ells long," a yellow line appeared from one end to the other. At "fifteen ells tall," a short yellow line appeared, standing erect, crosswise to the other. Then a third line ap-

peared, across the width of the box. "Three hundred nineteen ells."

"Three hundred nineteen ells wide?"

"Yes, three hundred nineteen ells wide."

"And eight hundred ells long?"

"Eight hundred fifty ells long."

Thorinn was silent in amazement. "Is it all full of things?"

"What is full?"

"I mean is part of it empty, or is it all full of stacks of things like this?"

"It is all full of stacks of things."

Thorinn tried to imagine it and could not. Where could such an incredible accumulation of treasures have come from?"

"Who made this cave?" he asked.

"What is made?"

Thorinn tried to explain and grew hot-faced from exasperation. "Well, look here," he said finally and picked up his light-box. "I made this box. I cut these pieces of wood and glued them together, and I fitted the pieces of mica in here at the ends — well, one of them is gone now, I lost it in the river. Then I made the lid and put it on here, and then the box was made, you see. I made it."

In the crystal, an image of Thorinn appeared, fitting little  
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pieces of wood together. It was over in a moment, and the figure held a light-box in its hand.

"You made this box?"

"That's right. Now who made all this? Who made you?"

"A box made me."

"You mean you made yourself?"

"I mean I made me?"

"Well, did you?"

"A box made this box." In the crystal appeared a huge black engine, out of the end of which, one after another, were dropping little gray boxes, each with a glint of crystal inside it. They floated away out of sight; it made Thorinn dizzy to watch them.

"You mean an engine. An engine made you — and all these other things?"

"Engines made me and all these other things."

"Well, but who made the engines?"

"Engines made the engines."

Thorinn gave it up. He made the box show him the picture of the cave again, then what was around it. In the new picture, the cave was a tiny bright shape at the center, while all around it other transparent passages ran off in every direction, some twisting, some straight. His idea had been to find out the best way back to the Midworld, but as he asked the box to show him more and still

more, he grew fascinated by the maze of passages, caverns and shafts crisscrossing each other; there seemed to be no end to it. New lines kept floating into the picture, while the old ones grew smaller and closer together. "How did it ever come to be like that?" he asked. "The whole world?"

In the crystal, the network of lines vanished and a man's face appeared, brown and smiling; at least Thorinn supposed he was a man, though he was beardless. His black hair was cut short and combed back, exposing his ears and forehead. His lips moved. After a moment the box said, "This is the world." Behind the brown-faced man a big green and blue mottled ball was floating, against a background of darkness. The man's lips went on moving, but no sound came. The ball receded, grew very small.

"What is he saying?" Thorinn asked. "Let me hear what he says."

Now the man himself began speaking, but it was gibberish; Thorinn could not understand a word. The ball was tiny now, and to one side of it, over the man's head, a dot of yellow light appeared. It grew slowly; suddenly it was very big and bright, and Thorinn could see flames leaping from its surface.

Then it all vanished, and in-

stead he was looking at a green landscape dotted with men and women who were all standing looking up at something huge and flat and silvery that was receding slowly overhead, as if somehow they had brought the sky down and now were raising it again. The man's voice was still speaking, but Thorinn could not see where he was. Now the sky was high overhead where it belonged, and little dark engines were moving across it.

Then it changed again, and they were underground, watching a huge engine that ate its way into the solid rock, leaving a bright round tunnel behind it. Then there were scenes of great caverns full of engines and people, and floating egg-shaped things that crossed the caverns and darted along tunnels, up and down shafts, all brightly lit, shining. Then the brown man again, and behind him a picture like the drawing of the Underworld the box had shown him before, only it was circular, with many rings one inside the other and four straight lines radiating from the smallest circle of all, in the center. Then the circle changed into a ball again; this time it was white. Watching these pictures made Thorinn uneasy in a way he could not understand; it was like being afraid, and because there was nothing to be afraid of, this made

him angry. The brown man was still speaking; the yellow point of light had appeared, and the silvery ball, itself shrunken to a dot, was crawling away from it toward a cloud of other bright dots. Now the other dots swung, came closer, darting forward like frost-flakes in a storm until only one hung in the center of the crystal, growing larger and brighter.

"That's enough," Thorinn said. The crystal went dark.

"I haven't all day to sit watching such stuff," he said. "It's all nonsense anyhow," and he began turning over his heap of treasures, trying to decide what to take and what to leave behind.

### III

The magic jug was a problem. He thought of hanging it from his belt, but that would be awkward; and unless he could contrive some sort of lid for it, the jug would be spilling water down his leg. Whereas if he put it in his wallet, it would take up too much room. He could fill the jug with jewels, but then would the water run over?

He remembered that when he had first taken the jug from its wrapping, there had been no water in it or, at any rate, only a drop. Was it being wrapped up that made the difference? It was worth trying, anyhow. He cut a

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piece of the transparent stuff, wrapped it around the jug after pouring the water out and tied it tightly with strips of the same material. Later, when he came back from a trip to gather food, he opened it, and it was still almost dry. He filled it to the brim with jewels, wrapped it again and put it in his wallet.

The smallest piece of cloth he had was far too bulky to carry, but he cut off a strip half an ell wide and as long as he was tall. He spread this on the floor and rolled up his cheeseboxes and other things in it — clothing, shoes, the little figurines, tools and knives, the box, some leftover jewels — turning the ends in as he went. He did this twice over before he had the roll packed to his liking, with the heavier things in the middle, the food outside where it could be easily reached. He tied it with strips of cloth and with other strips contrived loops which would fit over his shoulders.

The box had said nothing while he was packing it, nor had he spoken to it. Thorinn felt a little hangdog about this, as if he had been lacking in politeness; but he reminded himself that the box was only an engine, and it probably did not care.

At any rate, the box had said that the cave was eight hundred fifty ells long and three hundred

nineteen ells wide; and in the picture it had shown him, there had been a tiny shaft through its roof to a tunnel above. It was near one end of the cavern as regards length and in the middle as regards width. If he could find it without wasting too much time in the search, it would be the quickest and best way out of the cavern, and Thorinn thought he knew how it could be done.

He set off down the aisle, counting his paces, and when he had gone a hundred and fifty ells, he turned to his right and began counting again. When he had gone six hundred ells, a gray wall loomed up ahead; he had reached the end of the cavern. He swung himself up onto the nearest rack and began to climb it.

The bottoms of the stacks disappeared; he was climbing in the fitful glow of his light-box with darkness all around. In the silence, the rack with its gray bundles seemed to glide downward past his body, as if he were not climbing at all, but hanging in midair and pulling down more and more of the rack like an endless serpent. In a few moments he saw a dim gray reflection overhead. It was the ceiling, and when he stood on top of the stack a moment later he could reach up and touch it with his hands. He could see the tops of other stacks to left and right, gray hummocks

rising out of the darkness, but there was no sign of any opening in the roof of the cave.

He turned away from the cavern wall, leaped to the next stack, then to the next, examining the ceiling from each. When he had traversed ten stacks in this way, he leaped the aisle to the next row and began working back along it, meaning to trace a path around and around the original ten stacks, like a man winding string on a twig, until he found the opening; but he had hardly begun his second cast when it appeared, off to his left: a round black hole in the ceiling.

The shaft was circular and three spans wide. Standing under it and stretching up his arm with the light-box, he thought he could make out a brownish something that might be a shield closing it at the top.

Standing on his toes, he could just get his hands onto the smooth walls of the shaft; but that was no matter. He planted himself directly under the opening, bent his knees, leaped. As he shot up into the opening, he put out his arms and knees, braced himself, came to rest. A thrust and a wriggle, and he was half an ell farther up; now he could support himself with hands and feet on one side, back against the other. Hampered a

little by the bundle across his shoulders, he still was able to climb rapidly enough. In a few moments his head was touching the brown hollow disk that closed the shaft. He touched it, and it swung aside; a black cusp widened to a circle. He was up, through it into darkness that turned suddenly to a flicker of pale light.

As those vast arching shapes exploded around him in a kind of silent sizzling, Thorinn flattened himself to the floor. The cold shield was under his hand; he slapped it frantically, felt it swing, felt the cool upward breath, then the shaft walls were burning his hands and knees as he braked his fall; the shield swung over his head, and the light was gone.

With pounding heart, Thorinn hung in the shaft and stared upward. There was no sound. He tried to remember what he had seen: vast arcs of light that swooped up flickering into the darkness... What could it have been? He was ready to let go and drop instantly, if the shield should begin to turn; but nothing happened. At last he nerved himself to climb the shaft again.

He put his hand on the shield, turned it carefully. A lozenge of darkness appeared; there was no sound, no scent of danger. Thorinn widened the opening until it was black and round above him.

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The lights, whatever they were, were gone completely. With painstaking caution he thrust his head up; then, bracing himself to hold the shield open, raised his arm with the light-box. Darkness. He raised himself a little, head and shoulders through the opening; and a sudden flicker burst almost under his chin, ran away swooping and shimmering upward in multiple arcs...

When he ducked his head down, the flickering died; darkness returned. After a moment he raised himself again. The lights sprang up, flickering, swooping far overhead. They steadied, burned clear and cold. Thorinn raised himself a little more, cautiously, then still more, and finally climbed out.

#### IV

He was standing at the bottom of a vast tunnel whose walls curved up to become the ceiling an incredible distance overhead. The lines of light ringed it; the nearest, only an ell away, was a white ribbon that curved up, up, growing thinner until it was no more than a bright thread above. On either side of it were others, set three ells apart. In one direction they were dazzling bright, in the other much dimmer and more diffuse; he counted twenty of each. The reason for the dif-



ference, he saw now, was that the rings were lighted only on one side, so that in one direction he saw not the lights themselves but their reflections in the tunnel wall. As he looked down the tunnel, the farthest ones were perfect upright circles, but those nearer to him grew fatter at the bottom until they were vast egg-shapes that leaned together overhead.

He was trembling; why had the box not made him understand how huge these tunnels were? He felt himself tiny and exposed; the distant rings were like giants' eyes staring. He glanced for comfort at the closed shield in the floor, then leaned to examine the nearest ring more closely. The floor was of some smooth, hard substance; embedded in it, the ring stood up two spans high, hollow on the bright side, flat on the other, with a flat dark edge the breadth of his hand. He touched the dark surface cautiously, then the bright; one was as cool as the other.

He hopped over it and took a stride toward the next ring. Far down at the black end of the tunnel, there was a flicker: a new ring inside the others. Thorinn stared at it; something was wrong. He turned, counting the bright rings, and there were still twenty.

He began to walk in long floating strides down the middle of

the tunnel. Each time he soared over one of the rings, a new one appeared ahead; the eye of blackness at the end of the tunnel remained always the same. He thought of the pictures in the box and of the egg-shaped things that darted along the tunnels, up and down the giant shafts. And the lights followed them wherever they went, so that where they were, there was light; and when they had passed, the tunnel waited in darkness . . .

He began to move faster, then to run, in order to see the bright rings run on ahead. A kind of exhilaration took him, and he ran faster and faster, as if he could catch the fleeing rings of light. The tunnel slipped by him in sepulchral silence, and again he began to feel that he was not moving at all, but posturing motionless in the air while the illusory tunnel flowed past him, out of one nothingness into another.

Without warning, the black eye at the end of the tunnel flared bright. Thorinn stumbled to a halt, arms flailing. What had been a black disk an instant ago was now a globe of light, striped with faint dark lines as if it were a spinning top, and for a moment the illusion was so strong that he almost turned to flee, certain that the monstrous globe, which filled the tunnel, was whirling down upon him. Then he saw that it

was not bulging, but hollow; he was looking through the end of the tunnel into some vast lighted space beyond.

As he approached, the last ring of the tunnel grew enormous around him, and he saw that the space beyond was a great shaft, striped with horizontal rings of light. Where the tunnel met the shaft, it flared out smoothly above and below; the floor dropped away with deceptive gentleness, like water pouring over the lip of a chasm, and the light-rings became ovals instead of circles. Using them as a ladder, Thorinn found that he could venture down the slope; and now he saw his way upward. To either side, the upright rings gave way to the horizontal rings of the shaft. He had only to descend to the lowest ring in the flared mouth of the tunnel, then step onto the nearest horizontal ring and begin to climb.

The dark upper surface of the ring was flat and level and two spans wide; he was able to walk on it with ease, knowing that if he stumbled he could reach up to catch himself against the lighted surface of the ring above. He was aware of the gulf beside him, but tried not to think of it. Above, the shaft was lighted for sixty ells, then vanished into darkness. Below —

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Some perversity made him want to see down into the depths of the shaft, even though it meant that he had to lean outward, bracing his hands against the overhanging lip of the ring above.

It was the same below, or almost the same — twenty rings of soft light merging into one another, then blackness. But in that blackness, close to the edge on which he stood, burned a fierce blue-white point of light. It was tiny and unwinking; he could not tell how far away it was, but he thought it must be very deep, or he would have been able to see it before.

He gazed downward awhile without moving, then straightened. He was dizzy, and he shook his head to clear it. The sight of that tiny brilliant dot had affected him profoundly, in a way he could not understand.

The brown man speaking his gibberish, and the tiny dots of light that moved...

He could not think, standing here on the narrow ledge. After a moment he turned back to the mouth of the tunnel and climbed the rings again until the wall began sloping back steeply, and he could sit down without taking off his pack and lean his back against it, with his legs dangling over the gulf.

Whatever he did, he must rest, eat and drink. He opened his wal-

let and took out a box of cheese. He unwrapped the magic jug and set it beside him, without troubling to empty out the jewels. After a little he tipped it to his mouth and found, as he had hoped, that there was water in it, enough to satisfy his thirst. When he had finished, he wrapped it up again.

The question was what was he going to tell people when he got back? Nothing had turned out as he expected. The earth had not grown colder as he descended; here in the shaft it was only as cool as a spring morning in Hovenskar. As for demons and giants, he had met none of them. How could it have come about that the Underworld was so different from what people believed?

It seemed to Thorinn that the vast emptiness was speaking to him, trying to convey some meaning which he could not quite grasp. He had touched it again and again, in the treasurehouse, in the caverns, in the dark tunnels and passageways, and each time it had slipped away from him.

He began to grow angry with himself, for of course the only thing to do was to go straight up the shaft to the Midworld.

He put the jug back in his wallet, climbed down and worked his way out on the horizontal ring again. He leaned out once more to look at that tiny, bril-

liant point of light; and it was still there, unmoving.

There had been a word that the brown man spoke, over and over, when he was talking of the bright dots that moved in darkness: *star*.

Could that be a "star," down there, in the depths of the Underworld? Perhaps if he knew what a star was, he would know what the brown man had been trying to say about the world; perhaps he would even learn why it was that all these great works, made by man, were now empty of man.

And now some demon began to whisper to him that it could not be so very far to the bottom of the shaft, that he could soon climb down and see the star, then climb back, with no harm done; and although he knew this was perverse and foolish, he could not resist it.

After all, what had he ever gained by caution? And how could he go back to the Midworld knowing that he had had the chance to see such a marvel and had refused it?

When he knew that his mind was made up, he felt a trembling of fear in his belly. But he knelt, put his weight on his hands; he let himself swing over and began to climb down the shaft toward the center of the Earth.

— DAMON KNIGHT  
GALAXY

# HEMEAC

by E. G. VON WALD



*"HEMEAC reporting, Her. The Janitor spilled oil on the floor. After the Trouble. Click."*

The Instructor made a short, sharp and sibilant sound. Immediately, the classroom was filled with one of those ominous silences that were becoming so common lately. While she made those faint stuttering sounds to herself, everyone waited in quiet, rigid terror.

HEMEAC stood at his desk near the back, breathing deeply and slowly, controlling his fear and attentively watching the glittering flatness of the Instructor's scanner. He knew that these things often indicated that someone would be sent to the Dean's office for a Special Examination, but a good student such as he

was did not break into trembling perspiration at the mere threat of a Special Examination. He kept telling himself this with mute intellectual vehemence, while his knees trembled under his silver mail tunic and a trickling rivulet of perspiration slid down his spine.

Involuntarily, his eyes dropped to the desk in front of him. Last week, IAC had been there, as he had been for the past sixteen years — as long as HEMEAC could remember. Then, somehow, he had made a mistake, probably a missed command for which he couldn't give an explanation. At any rate, he had been called up

to the Dean's office for a Special Examination. He had failed, as practically everybody else did these days, and had been promptly expelled from the University.

Dim, half-formed images of menace grew in HEMEAC's imagination as he considered the Outside World, where IAC was now. Beyond the impregnable gates of this comfortable University lay that war-torn ruin of a dying planet, a region of savages, injustice and bestiality, ruled by idiot renegades. The Savages had IAC now. HEMEAC wondered if they had already eaten him.

"HEMEAC!" sounded the crisp, level voice of the Instructor. "Eyes front!"

"Click," said HEMEAC with terrified calm, as he raised his eyes from the empty desk to the scanner where they belonged.

"Recite," she ordered. "Define the term 'education.'"

"Click. By education is meant the training and disciplining of those beings who can be benefited by such improvement. Such as humans and some of the higher animals."

Silence for a long moment. Then the Instructor said, "Inaccurate and incomplete, HEMEAC. Education is the leading of an organic intellect into higher orders of perfection of knowledge and discipline. Note the word 'or-

ganic'. Do you know why that is included in the definition, HEMEAC?"

"Because," he replied with quick student's logic, "robots do not have to be educated."

"Inaccurate," stated the Instructor calmly. "The robotic intelligence not only does not have to be educated, it *cannot* be educated. The full perfection of its mode of action is already complete in its first operation. Perfection, in the sense of having achieved the ultimate in its development, is intrinsic to the robotic being. Robots do not learn. Except for accidental information of a superficial nature, they already know all that is necessary for full functionability when they are turned on. This is true even of those robots who have a curiosoreflex in their circuitry. HEMEAC, do you know what a curiosoreflex is?"

"Click. It is a random-information-seeker."

The Instructor waited. HEMEAC dutifully continued his memorized recitation.

"It is included in all primary control computers, of which only one remains in service here at the University. Organic intellects have a similar system for the random study of potentially useful information, which is called curiosity because of its resemblance to the curiosoreflex. Like most

other organic faculties, however, it is subject to individual voluntary control, and therefore is not as efficient as the curioso."

"Very well," said the Instructor. She hummed and buzzed and clicked for a few moments, after which she added, "This is a class in Social Philosophy, HEMEAC, not Robot Circuitry. Kindly stick to the subject in the future."

"Click," said HEMEAC.

The Instructor was briefly silent again, as her scanner examined the student listing before calling on another boy.

"OBSIC."

"Click," piped the boy.

"Describe the purpose of education."

"The purpose of education," stated OBSIC in calm, even tones, "is to develop the human mind so that it may approach the natural perfection of the robotic intelligence as closely as its limited faculties will permit."

His voice went on in rote recitation, but HEMEAC's mind was wandering again. He glanced at the empty desk in front of him and wondered what it was really like out there in the Outside World where there were no robots any more with their beautiful shiny faces, but only animals and ruins. HEMEAC had some difficulty in visualizing a human being like himself living as an ani-

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mal, but he knew that it was so. He had seen them once from that window in the Dean's office.

He pictured himself marching out the low, triple-sealed gate, as IAC had been forced to do, and falling into the hands of the wild, barking savages who always waited there for just that very thing.

And there was good reason for them to wait, too. The University expelled somebody almost every week lately.

"Why all the stalling, HEMEAC?" he suddenly heard the Instructor announce in a loud voice.

Terrified, he looked around and saw that the class period was over and that the other students were filing out into the corridor in an orderly line, while there he was — still standing at his desk.

"Her," he mumbled, "somebody spilled oil in the corridor. I could smell it." Spilled oil, he knew, was always a matter for legitimate concern. And oil was always being spilled.

"What does oil in the corridor have to do with your time sense?" asked the Instructor.

"It is a waste. It should be reported."

"It has already been reported," said the Instructor, dismissing him. "Pay better attention in the future."

"Click!" HEMEAC turned and half ran toward the door.

"Stiffly there, HEMEAC," she

admonished him. "Stiffly. And less of that random motion. That's just as wasteful as spilling oil."

Obediently, HEMEAC slowed down and walked with the correct, measured pace, his shoulders thrown back, head erect, eyes forward, mind blank. Or almost blank, at least. That unadmitted terror was still there.

He managed to fall in at the end of the line and followed the rest of the students down the long, cluttered, oil-stained corridor, down the steps, down more dirty corridors and more steps through the huge building until they finally reached the dormitory level. There he filed in with the rest of the class, a pitifully small group of students in a hall built for thousands, walking slowly and precisely past the rows of cubicles until they came to their own.

HEMEAC was still walking after the rest had stopped, because he was out of his regular place in the line. Fearfully, aware of the all-seeing eye of the Monitor, he moved up to his cubicle, stopped and waited. Like all the other students, he stood and waited for the command, listening to the disciplined rustle of their colleagues as they also breathed and waited, every nerve alert.

There was a sudden rush of

sound as the other students turned in a body and walked into their cubicles. HEMEAC, realizing he had missed the command again, quickly turned himself and took one step across the threshold.

"HEMEAC," said the voice of the Monitor.

"Click." He froze where he was, one foot inside the cubicle, the other foot still in the corridor.

"Moving too jerky. What's the matter, didn't you get the command?"

"Click. I got it," he lied.

"Why the delay?"

"There was some oil spilled in the classroom corridor," HEMEAC suggested hopefully. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that another student had unwisely paused to listen to the discussion. The Monitor saw it too, of course, and snapped, "Mind blank!" and the erring boy quickly scurried on inside his cubicle.

"Now then, HEMEAC," the Monitor went on. "What does oil in the classroom corridor have to do with your time-command sense?"

"It is such a waste," said HEMEAC. He tried to think of an excuse that he had not used so recently. None came. "It was— you know—" His voice trailed off.

The Monitor hummed an off-key note. "Waiting, HEMEAC."

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Frantically the boy thought, his well trained mind racing around in an inaudible flutter of synapses and the gallop of urgent ideas. He thought of IAC and the Outside World and the Special Examination he might have to take if he couldn't figure out an acceptable excuse for his failure. He knew that the reason why he had missed the command was a preoccupying fear, but to admit such a thing would be disastrous. "There was oil," he said lamely. "I slipped on it a little, and in maintaining my balance, I think I strained a muscle."

The Monitor hummed off and on, as she considered the excuse. Finally she said, "Very well, HEMEAC. Report to the Physician after fueling."

"Click," said the boy in a wavering voice.

"And watch your speech," the Monitor added loudly. "You are using high order tonals. You should have passed them three years ago."

"Click," agreed HEMEAC dully.

"That's better."

HEMEAC, understanding that he had been dismissed for the moment, lifted his second foot and placed it beside the other in his cubicle, and the door hummed shut behind him. The light sprang from the ceiling, bathing every HEMEAC

thing in the tiny room with a soft, cool effulgence, including the milky porridge that was waiting on a tray. HEMEAC sat down and ate, carefully holding himself erect and stiff, moving his arm and mouth as little as possible. He tried to blank his mind, but it kept wondering about the excuse he would have to give the Physician for not having any strained muscles.

It was difficult for a person to survive in this, the last cozy retreat of world civilization. And somehow it seemed to be becoming rapidly more difficult. Particularly during the past year, the perfect reasonableness of the robotic intelligence had seemed inexplicable to him. The thought of his lack of normal progress toward the ideal tortured him almost as much as his fear of the fatal expulsion it might incur.

Mind blank, mind blank, mind blank, he recited to himself.

Some day, he thought, it will be good and I will not have to be afraid of missing commands or not understanding the purposes of things, and then maybe the Dean will let me do design work in the machine shop.

Mind blank, he said to himself.

He pictured the beautiful, blue-gleaming perfection of an integrally-lubricated joint and smiled. But the smile did not reach his lips. It stayed in his mind



where sharp-eyed Monitors would not see it.

Mind blank, he said to himself.

He thought of the tired face and terrified eyes that were all he remembered of 'IAC, marching toward the gate. He thought of the Outside World where people were animals and had no robots to teach them.

Mind blank, he said to himself.

The bowl was empty, and his stomach was full. Unconsciously, HEMEAC breathed a sigh of animal contentment. He placed the spoon beside the bowl on the tray and stiffly waited. There was a command due for him to report to the Physician, right after the other students were commanded to report to class, and this time he was confident he would get it.

Out in the corridor there came a rumbling as the other students marched back to the afternoon class in History. He waited.

Now, he said to himself.

He stood up; the door opened, and he walked out into the corridor, moving down the row of cubicles with measured, precise pace, head up, shoulders back, chest out, eyes straight ahead and mind blank. Well, almost blank, anyway. He was wondering if he had timed it right.

"HEMEAC."

He stopped abruptly and stood with rigid obedience. "Click."

"Ninety four seconds late. Why the delay? Didn't you get the command to report for class?"

"Click. I got it. But my command was to report to the Physician, which comes after the command to report to class."

The Monitor hummed and buzzed. She said, "Correct. You may proceed." But then she quickly added a short "sssszzzz," and snapped, "HEMEAC, you may account for your unauthorized presence in the dormitory."

"Her?" squeaked HEMEAC, his voice a full octave too high in his surprise.

"Very high order tonal," commented the Monitor. "Unexplained presence in the Dormitory. Two simultaneous offenses are beyond my capacity to analyze. Decision: Report to the Dean's office for a Special Examination."

"The Physician —," started HEMEAC desperately.

"The Dean will decide whether you should report to the Physician," replied the Monitor and shut up.

The Dean was in one of her chatty modes, a bad sign. She said, "Sit down, HEMEAC, and we'll talk about things."

"Click." He obeyed, sitting on a low stool directly before her scanner, keeping his eyes away from the window that was just above it.

"How are you getting on with your work, HEMEAC?"

"Satisfactory progress, Her," he replied.

"You are charged with stalling in the classroom, high order tonals, and failure to report to the Physician as ordered," the Dean said cheerfully. "Can you account for these matters?"

He couldn't. He couldn't even imagine why the Dean's record of the sequence was apparently incomplete and inaccurate. He thought of mentioning the Dormitory Monitor's paradoxical orders, but decided against such a clear demonstration of how far short of the ideal intelligence he fell. Instead, he said simply, "It was an accident."

"Mmmmm," the Dean purred. "Something in here about oil in the corridors, too. Did you spill some oil this morning, HEMEAC?"

"No, Her."

The Dean pondered. "You said something about oil, though, didn't you?"

"It was just some old oil in the corridor that somebody else spilled," HEMEAC said cautiously. "I could smell it."

"What is it," the Dean said obliquely, "that bothers you about the sense of smell?"

"Oil," said HEMEAC insistently. "I smelled oil."

"The smell of spilled oil didn't HEMEAC

frighten you, did it — just because we have so little of it these days?"

"No, Her."

"Splendid, HEMEAC," the Dean purred. "I'm glad to hear that. Always remember, the Good Robot is never afraid. Fear is a purely organic reaction. It therefore interferes with the society of machines and men, right? And we couldn't tolerate anything like that — particularly here at the University. Right?"

"Click."

"Then why did you miss that command — just a moment, HEMEAC, while I relocate that record of yours. I seem to have misfiled it."

There was a passing silence, and as he waited, the boy's eyes strayed to that window above the Dean's scanner. It was the only opening in the entire University that showed directly on the Outside World. Through it he could see the savages and renegades, who wandered about the clearing out there like idiot children, everyone seeming to move at random.

It was easy to distinguish between a savage and a renegade. The renegades had some sort of rudimentary education, as evidenced by the fact that they all dressed identically — except for some markings on their shoul-

ders. One of these now glanced up at the window, pointed at him, and then shouted at the others. Soon they were all watching him through the big window. HEMEAC stared back, terrified and uncomprehending.

"Ah," stated the Dean, interrupting his thoughts. "I see. Your scholastic record is very good, HEMEAC. You also do your machine shop work with great precision. Why this sudden breakdown in your time-sense just because you spilled a little oil?"

"I smelled it," HEMEAC insisted. "I did not spill it."

"It is of no importance," insisted the Dean in her turn. "Why did it bother you?"

HEMEAC swallowed. He had expected this Examination to be tricky, but nothing had prepared him for anything quite as wicked as this. He stared at the scanner, resolutely ignoring the stirring fear in his stomach, and repeated, "Somebody spilled oil in the corridor. It is a waste."

There was no immediate reply. HEMEAC held his breath for a few moments before he realized what he was doing and then exhaled slowly, so that it would not be noticed. The subject had never come up, but he was pretty sure the Good Robot did not hold her breath.

"Oh yes," the Dean commented finally. "There was some oil

spilled there this morning, after all. The Janitor had an accident, owing to the fact that she is badly in need of repairs. It is a pity that we have only one Janitor left in the entire University. The place was designed to take the services of ten."

HEMEAC nodded with slow, precise respect.

"We had the full quota of ten at the beginning, you know. But now, although we have far more maintenance problems, we have only one. Ever since the Trouble, when the renegades destroyed the replacement-parts factories, maintenance has slowly grown worse. And the poor savages haven't been able to rebuild substitutes for the factories yet. Do you remember the Trouble, HEMEAC? No," she quickly corrected herself, "of course you don't. The Trouble was many years ago, and you are still in your teens."

"Click," said HEMEAC modestly, although this matter was precisely the subject under study in the History class.

"A most unreasonable situation," the Dean said. "Some day I will have to collect all my tapes on the subject." She paused, hummed and faintly clicked and buzzed. "Sometimes," she said finally, "I wish they had not included a curioso in my computer.

It is very irritating to have to be without the key elements of situation-information."

"Irritating?" echoed HEMEAC.

"Organic term," explained the Dean. "What I mean is that my scanner keeps going over my tapes, even though I already know the answer isn't there. It is hard on maintenance, and it takes up so much time."

"Click," said HEMEAC.

"But we are getting off the subject, aren't we? You still haven't told me all about that oil. Why did you spill all that oil?"

"The Janitor spilled it," said HEMEAC carefully.

"Oh, yes. So she did," the Dean replied. There was a faint chattering of micro-miniature relays hidden in the cabinet. "One of the reflexion elbows here is leaking pretty badly these days," said the Dean. "The lubricant is altering the dielectric characteristics of some of my large capacitors. I have to keep shifting circuits, and sometimes the tapes don't follow."

"In any event," she concluded, "there doesn't seem to be much substance to the charge of spilling oil, HEMEAC. I'll strike that."

"Thank you, Her," said HEMEAC.

"Now let's talk about your using high order tonals. This charge comes from your Dormitory Monitor. There is no detail in HEMEAC

cluded, however, and I seem to be unable to contact her at the moment. Perhaps she is temporarily out of order. Please excuse me while I notify the Janitor."

There was a brief pause.

"The Janitor seems to be temporarily out of order also," the Dean said. "So we shall have to get along without any help. You must explain why you used high order tonals yourself, HEMEAC."

"I don't know anything about it, Her," HEMEAC said in a quiet, even tone of voice.

"You are certainly using tonals suitable for your age group now," the Dean observed. "Maybe the Monitor needs servicing. Everything seems to need servicing these days. If only we could get a few new Janitors it would be a big help. But for years the savages and renegades have been able to supply us with nothing but human fuel, which is hardly of any use in the Maintenance Department."

HEMEAC studiously stared at the scanner, blinking his eyes once every four seconds, keeping his breathing regular, his chin up, and mind blank.

"Well," the Dean concluded, "we'll just erase that bit of data from your tab, HEMEAC. There is no reason to punish you for something that has gone wrong

with your Monitor's circuitry, is there?"

"Oh no, Her," said HEMEAC, unconsciously emitting a sigh of relief.

The Dean pounced upon it instantly. "There. That certainly sounded like a high order tonal. About third, I'd say, without getting into a partial analysis of the waveform.

Eyes front, mind blank, blank, blank, said HEMEAC to himself urgently.

"You are not having any personality troubles, are you?" asked the Dean.

"No, Her."

"You do get the commands as your record says, don't you?"

"Click." Or at least, if he didn't get them, somebody else did, and HEMEAC was generally alert enough to follow suit without any perceptible delay.

"That's fine, HEMEAC. It's just a matter of timing. If you know the time the commands will come, you can receive them, because they are always self-evident and never change. All you need is the pattern and the rhythm. It's the same thing that wakes you at the same precise time every morning, right?"

"Click."

"Good. It would be so inappropriate to have to expell a boy with a name like yours, HEMEAC. Did you ever see your name-

sake? No, that's right, you couldn't. She was destroyed in the Trouble."

"I have seen pictures of her," HEMEAC said helpfully. "She was very beautiful."

"You should say she was very orderly," corrected the Dean. "And you are referring only to her appearance, which is unimportant. An even if you had been alive while she was still functioning, it would have been quite impossible for you to have appreciated her true internal order anyway, since we could not connect you directly into her marvelous computer. No connections on organic intellects, you know."

"Click."

"It certainly was a barbarous act for those renegades to destroy her like that."

"Click. Barbarous." HEMEAC was in dutiful agreement.

"Barbarous," said the Dean. She was silent for a moment, then clicked faintly, sputtered briefly as an aged circuit shorted before being cut out permanently with another faint click, then hummed again.

HEMEAC waited, suddenly terrified with the thought that she might have given him one of her silent dismissal commands. But before he could decide what to do about it, she said, "Oil."

"Click," said HEMEAC instantly. "Oil." This was certainly the trickiest examination he had even taken. No wonder most students flunked out.

"What," said the Dean after a moment, "was it that you wanted to know about the Trouble, HEMEAC?"

"I wanted to know about the Trouble," the boy replied without the slightest hesitation.

"You did? I know you had said something about it," the Dean purred, humming intermittently to herself. "A very curious subject. For instance, there is nothing of record as to the reasons for the Trouble in the first place. Here at the University, we were doing our job as always, turning out students with well-nigh robotic perfection inside their heads, even if we did have to keep an occasional boy for fifty or sixty years to do it. If it hadn't been for your namesake, HEMEAC, it is quite possible that the University would have been completely dismantled during that great upheaval. But she was mobile and managed to set a fuse on the Base Power Plant.

"The Renegades, of course, knew what would happen to them — as well as to most organic life in this part of the planet — if that power plant had ever exploded."

"Click," agreed HEMEAC.

"They destroyed her, though.

HEMEAC

Fortunately, she and I were in direct connection at the moment of her destruction, so I simply took her place. Unfortunately, most of her memory tapes are in a code I have been unable to decipher. But at least, I was able to save the University."

"Click," agreed HEMEAC.

The Dean hummed and clicked quietly. "I am still unable to contact the Janitor," she said. "I have several urgent maintenance problems myself. If I am unable to get in communication with the Janitor, it is impossible for me to continue to function for very long. ssszzzzzzzzclick. HEMEAC, you may explain your presence in my office."

"My Dormitory Monitor ordered me here, Her," HEMEAC said.

"I am unable to contact your Monitor," replied the Dean. "If only we could get some service robots from the factories."

"Click, but the factories were destroyed by the renegades," said the boy, cautiously feeling his way along this new turn of questioning.

"You don't have to worry about the renegades, HEMEAC," the Dean hastened to advise him, as if a maternal-circuit had just cut in. "They can't hurt you. They know that if they attack, I shall simply cut the fuse on the power plant, and that will contaminate

the atmosphere for centuries. They know these things."

"Click," agreed HEMEAC.

"Click," said the Dean.

"Click."

"What were you doing with that oil, HEMEAC?"

"The Janitor spilled it."

"Mmmmmmm. Oh, yes, so she did. Odd you should have that information, HEMEAC. But that is no reason for you to waste time talking to me when you should be in History class."

HEMEAC swallowed. That had been a little fast for him, but he wasted no time starting to leave.

"Mind blank," advised the Dean.

"Click."

The Dean buzzed and chattered to herself for a moment, followed by a crescendo of clicking relays. Then silence.

HEMEAC departed. He walked along the corridor, happily contemplating the fact that apparently he had passed.

As he entered the History classroom, OBSIC was just completing a round of recitation.

"—and in the Trouble, the renegades launched only that single attack, before asking for a truce."

"Very well, OBSIC," the Instructor said as HEMEAC took his place behind his desk and

commenced his dutiful staring at her scanner. "And where have you been, HEMEAC?"

"I was at the Dean's office, Her. It was a Special Examination, which I passed."

The Instructor was silent, as she tapped the nerve cables set in the concrete floor, which connected her directly through the network to the Dean's curious computer.

"The Dean," she announced after a moment, "has no record of your presence there."

HEMEAC stiffened. He said nothing. Nothing could be said. In the silence that followed, he continued with determination to stare at the impassive scanner, but his knees were wobbly under his silver-mail tunic, and there was real terror in his stomach. Perspiration trickled down the side of his nose and dripped from his chin, but he was totally unaware of it.

"As a matter of fact," the Instructor went on calmly, "the Dean has no record even of your existence here at the University; when I fed her the data on you, there was not the slightest pip of recognition from her. It was just as if there were full open circuit in her central control."

HEMEAC waited fearfully. "Hence," concluded the Instructor, "it is clear that you

have been expelled from the University and have no right to be present in this classssssss —" She suddenly interrupted herself with a very gay series of sizzlings and clatterings that lasted almost ten seconds.

"Why all the stalling, HEMEAC?" she said at length. "Don't you know the lesson?"

"Click," the boy responded instantly. He had to pause for breath, though, before he could recite. With even, disciplined voice, he went on to say, "In the Trouble, the University Central, called HEMEAC for Helio-Electronic - Mobile - Educational - Activator-Computer, was largely destroyed by the renegades, but not before she informed them of the automatic fuse she had set on the Power Plant.

"This fuse," he went on, "is now under the control of the Dean, and she will protect the University indefinitely, provided she is given adequate maintenance.

"In the truce that followed, the renegades agreed to supply the University with human fuel and whatever replacement parts the savages could manufacture. To date, they have been unable to solve the problem of replacements. However, it is considered self-evident that in time they will be successful, since without replacement parts, the University HEMEAC

cannot continue to fulfill her function."

"Very good," stated the Instructor, "except that you missed the matter of put ssszzzz click."

"Click," agreed HEMEAC contritely.

"The Instructor was silent. The students waited. The silence grew.

After several minutes, there was a vague stirring as their uneasiness mounted. It was much too early yet for the class to be over, but such silence was always the signal in the past.

HEMEAC decided. He turned and started out of the room. The instant he moved, all thirty-seven other students moved in an identical manner, marching out and down the corridor. Strange loud noises came from the direction of the main gate, but they ignored them and continued their slow, precise marching toward the Dormitory level.

By the time they got there, strange noises were coming from all around them. And they found that there were people in their Dormitory room. Renegades. Five of them, and more in the corridors.

Without the slightest hesitation, HEMEAC led the class into the midst of the renegades, on past them, and down the corridor to their proper cubicles. There



he stopped, and all students turned as a single person to face the blank wall. They waited for the command to enter. When it seemed to be about the proper time, they turned together and stepped inside. Doors did not close, however, and lights did not come on. And there was no food waiting.

HEMEAC came on back out to the corridor. "Monitor," he said, "there must be an open circuit somewhere, because there is no food."

After a moment's hesitation, HEMEAC stiffened into a pose of robotic rigidity, which was the proper attitude in such a situation. This was a new thing, an unprecedented thing. But he knew very well that the Good Robot ignored new things until suitable instructions came from her Central. HEMEAC waited for his instructions, aware that the rest of the class was now in the corridor with him, waiting.

One of the renegades walked up to him. "Will they fight?"

"No," somebody else answered, "they don't know how to fight."

From the opposite end of the corridor, came a troup of uniformed renegades. One of them announced, "All taken care of, Captain. I've dismantled the fuse and cut power to everything but air conditioning and general lighting. But it was just as you fig-

ured. The Dean's computer was inoperative. It finally wore out."

"It's finished then," said the captain softly. "After all this time, it's finally finished." He sighed. "Now all we have to do is to try to reeducate these kids."

"How long will it take?"

"Hard to tell. If they were younger, there wouldn't be so much of a problem. But by now —" The captain shrugged. "I have no idea. Just look at them."

There was a brief silence, as everybody stared at the row of rigid students. HEMEAC, terrified and uncomprehending, didn't move a muscle. He continued his fixed posture of waiting, but was almost tearfully wishing that the instructions would come. He was frightened by the vicious renegades here in the sacred precincts of the University.

"It's awful," one of the renegades whispered. "Why — why, they're not even human beings any more. What can anybody do for them now? They're nothing but living robots!"

HEMEAC heard, but his training saved him from disgrace. Not the slightest trace of the bursting surge of pride at this ultimate compliment appeared on his face. He stood with shoulders back, chin up, eyes straight ahead and mind blank.

Well, almost blank, anyway.

— E. G. VON WALD

GALAXY

# GALAXY'S STARS

*Fritz Leiber's* theatrical background in *A Specter Is Haunting Texas* is come by honestly. Our Fritz Leiber is the second of that name to achieve a certain fame in the world (for which reason he signed himself "Fritz Leiber, Jr." until the death of his father some years ago.) The elder Fritz was a celebrated Shakespearean actor (and part-time Hollywood veteran; he can still be seen on the Late Shows, usually playing the part of the wicked cardinal or the baleful knight), and the younger Fritz toured with him in some years of stock.

In fact, when you come to think of it, this *Lieber Fritz* is a man of many parts: whilom editor of *Science Digest*, top-ranked tournament chess player, former seminary student and, above all, writer. His current interests are the study of the Watts Towers, strange art objects created some decades ago in Los Angeles, and the processes of vulcanology, sparked by some of the research that went into *Specter*. This summer he will be teaching a course in science-fiction writing at Clarion College, working on an unusual Christmas story for our December issue — and breathing hard after finishing *Specter*.

*Damon Knight* came to New York out of Hood River, Oregon, in the late thirties, joined the colony of science-fiction-fans-turning-pro called the Futurian Society (other members: Isaac Asimov, Donald A. Wollheim, the late C. M. Kornbluth and your editor) and immediately began a protean career. He is one of the few persons ever to receive a Hugo as a literary critic; even more unusual, other critics agree he deserved it. Author of scores of stories and novels, he has distinguished himself as editor and anthologist as well and is the founder and principal guiding spirit behind both the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference and the Science Fiction Writers of America. With his wife, Kate Wilhelm, also a successful science-fiction writer, he lives in a huge house which they are filling as rapidly as possible with children. For many years Damon signed his name with lower-case initials — "damon knight" — but in 1964 he considered he had reached a point where he deserved capitals. We had thought so long before that.

*E. G. Von Wald* is a Florida architect during working hours; as a science-fiction writer, he has

appeared in our companion magazine, *If*, and elsewhere. HEME-AC is his first story in *Galaxy*.

*Burt K. Filer*, a New Yorker, divides his time among science-fiction writing, inventing gadgets and playing the stock market. His wife, Ann, is also a writer; but it's a versatile family and *her* other occupation is computer programmer. Filer's debut was with an "If First Story" in our companion magazine little over a year ago. Since then he has begun to appear rather frequently — and will, we trust, be appearing in the future more frequently still.

*Vaughn Bodé*, our cover artist, is a graduate student in art at Syracuse University (home to many a science-fiction type; Syracuse, among other things, is the first major university to establish a manuscript collection of the papers of science-fiction writers). Vigorous, colorful, almost cartoony, Bodé's style of painting has attracted attention from the art world as well as in science fiction. His current project is to make his debut as a writer, with a story around one of his own covers.



## FORECAST

A dozen years or so ago, a youngster named Robert Silverberg won a Hugo as "most promising new science-fiction writer of 1956." Since then he has not been idle. The number of Silverberg words that have appeared in print since then must be reckoned in the tens of millions — magazine articles, non-fiction books, mysteries, works of many kinds — and although scores of Silverberg stories have appeared in the science-fiction magazines, they are only a tiny part of the total production. In fact there were years on end when he produced little or no science fiction, because the press of other commitments forbade.

Lately, as you've seen if you've been reading *Galaxy* and *If*, he's been back with us pretty regularly; and lately, too, that early promise has begun to be fulfilled. Next month's lead novelette, a long one, is by Silverberg. It's richly inventive, taking us into a world of a good many thousand years from now, in that ancient city called Roum, where a defeated human race waits for the aliens who have won it to claim their prize of war. The title is *Nightwings*, and it strikes us as the best story Robert Silverberg ever wrote, and a promise of splendid things to come.

James E. Gunn, Brian W. Aldiss, Ross Rocklynne are some of the others in the issue, along with the conclusion of Leiber's *Specter* . . . join us, won't you?

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